Italian-crafted

Studies 2012-2016

Paulo Martins Oliveira

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Title: *Italian-crafted. Studies 2012-2016*
Author: Paulo Martins Oliveira
Collection and edition: October, 2025
Front and back cover: details from Caravaggio's *Basket of Fruit* (image wikimedia.org)
Page format: mainly A4, also 6x9

Until 2016 this research was published mostly at https://independent.academia.edu/PauloOliveira51
also being partially collected in *Separata 1, Separata 3, The Akenpapers 1*
On this issue, see also other studies in *Leonardo x Michelangelo*
Furthermore, some of the studies collected here have been continued in *Octógono – cadernos de polissemia artística*, available at:
https://independent.academia.edu/PauloMartinsOliveira_octogono
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Studies

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LEONARDO'S *LAST SUPPER* AND THE THREE LAYERS *

Paulo Martins Oliveira

Introduction

Reflecting a dynamic method consolidated in the 15th century, the *Last Supper* of Leonardo da Vinci is based on the ability to combine narratives and encode messages by using ambiguities and compromise solutions.

Thus, that painting presents three layers of meaning, of which even the first and superficial is actually elaborate.

The first layer of meaning

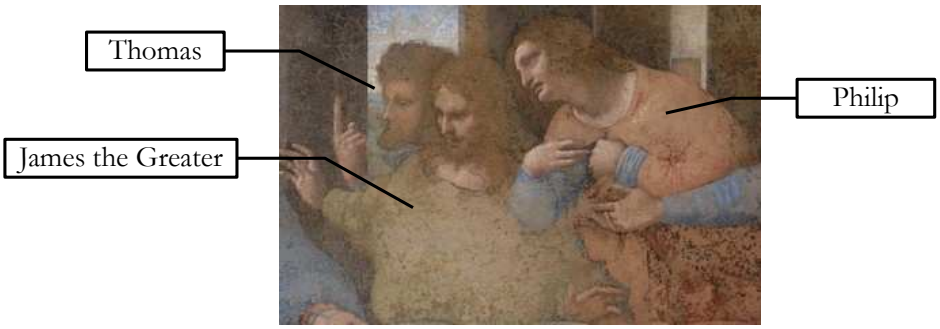
1) Representing much more than the announcement of the treason, the *Last Supper* starts by merging the different events that followed that moment, which are distinctly mentioned in the four Gospels.

1.1) So, the first group on the left represents the initial surprise caused by the announcement (Jn.13:22).

Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper (det.)

1.2) Also not implying a direct interaction with Christ, the opposite group represents the discussion about which of the apostles will betray Him (Lk.22:23).

1.3) Then, the disciples asked Him individually, each fearing to be the future traitor (Mt.26:22; Mk. 14:19). This is expressed by the anguished Philip, in the intermediate group on the right.



Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper (det.)

1.4) Next, the disciples began to argue again, but now about which of them was the most important (Lk.22:24). This is symbolized by the presumption of the censurable Thomas.

1.5) Standing between them, James the Greater opens his arms and tries to protect Christ from such anxiety (his posture will be instrumental for the second layer of meaning).

1.6) In the other intermediate group, Peter calls John and asks him to question Jesus about the identity of the mysterious traitor (Jn.13:24).

Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper (det.)

1.7) Peter holds a knife that symbolizes his temper, because he will hurt a guard soon after the meal (Jn.18:10).

1.8) Showing a guilty look, Judas cannot resist stealing some bread, for he already was corrupt and a thief (Jn.12:6). Moreover, it would be through bread that Judas will reveal himself as the future traitor (Mk.14:20; Jn.13:26).

The second layer of meaning

2) This superimposed narrative continues the previous and presents the tragic destiny of Christ.

2.1) Firstly, the attitude of Peter is deliberately ambiguous and dubious. On the one hand, it suggests aggressiveness, for Peter was jealous of John (Jn.21:20-22), who was Christ's favourite disciple.

2.2) But on the other hand, Peter bows to John, in a strange reverential posture. This is due to the fact that the figure of "John" also represents the Virgin Mary.

Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper (det.)

Sandro Botticelli
The Adoration of the Magi (det.)

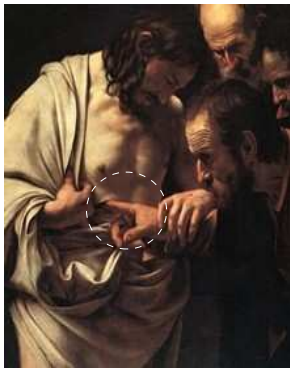
2.3) Indeed, at that time several artists usually merged different identities into a single figure, by using compromise solutions. In this case, Leonardo combined the Virgin Mary and John because this apostle was chosen to take care for the Virgin, as decided by the agonizing Christ (Jn.19:26-27).

2.4) Because the crucifixion is a key element in this layer, the same composite character represents Mary Magdalene, synthesizing the three main figures who stood near Christ when he died.

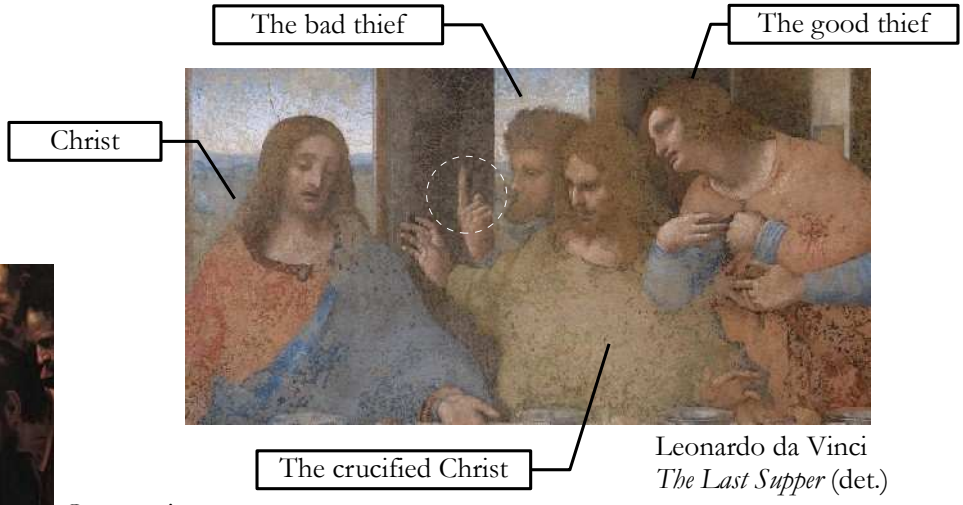
Some examples of composite figures

2.5) So, leaving an empty space in between, Christ moves away from that allegorical character (who represents His most loved ones), and approaches James the Greater, who symbolizes the crucified Jesus, flanked by the two "thieves".

2.6) Philip and Thomas are presented as thieves because somehow they had doubted Christ (Jn.14:8-14, 20:24-29), but only the "bad thief" Thomas insisted on proof.

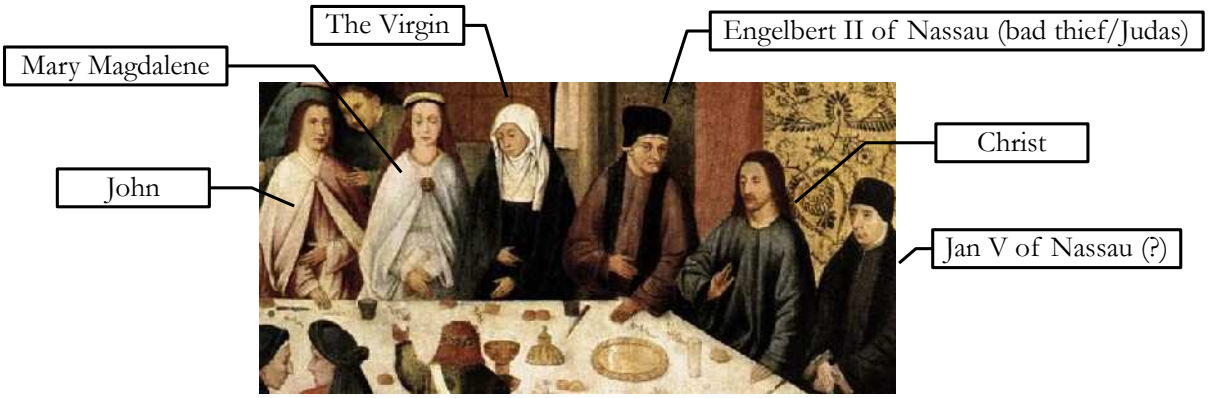


Caravaggio
The incredulity of St. Thomas (det.)
The double meaning of the finger
(presumption and doubt)



Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper (det.)

2.7) There are other variants regarding the same issue:



Jheronimus Bosch
The Marriage Feast at Cana (det.) [copy of Rotterdam]

This complex work also veils an alternative Last Supper. Here, John, Magdalene, and the Virgin are individualized from each other, while Jesus is separated and flanked by the two "thieves" (Bosch's contemptible clients, who thought they were being honoured). There are several and clear connections between different works of Jheronimus Bosch and of Leonardo, but since this in particular is a copy, it is impossible to determine if Bosch influenced the Italian, or vice versa.

2.8) Another interesting example was developed by Caravaggio:

The bad thief is the maverick Michelangelo Buonarroti, next to Michelangelo da Caravaggio

Michelangelo Buonarroti
by Bonasone

The good thief is a more complex figure, made of several layers

Caravaggio
The Supper at Emmaus

In this elaborate painting, Christ is flanked by a good thief ("crucified" as He was), and a bad thief (with his arms behind the crossbeam, in a common variant of the crucifixion of the thieves).

Christ

Rembrandt
The Lamentation
(Christ and the thieves)

2.9) In Milan, the path to crucifixion is confirmed on the opposite side of Leonardo's *Last Supper*, by a painting of Donato Montorfano (these relations between opposite walls were common in Italy).

Donato Montorfano
The Crucifixion

The third layer

3.) This is the most complex and deep narrative, integrating strong criticisms about the "Church of Peter", at that time ruled by Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia).

3.1) In this third layer, the composite figure next to Peter represents specifically Mary Magdalene, expressing the human dimension of Christ, valued by the humanists as a symbol of proximity to Mankind.

3.2) Since it was now impossible to use the obvious satirical Pope Joan, the humanists turned directly and indirectly to the ambiguous St. Mary Magdalene, in order to encode their perspectives and criticism.

3.3) In contrast to that peaceful composite figure, Peter and his knife represent here the repression and the desire for control by the Inquisition.

The coat of arms
of the Inquisition

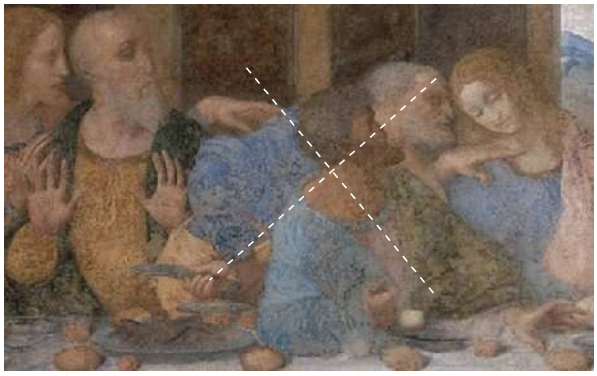
3.4) Distancing himself, Andrew (Peter's humble brother) expresses the positive side of the Church, often connoted with the Franciscan Order.

Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper (det.)

Depictions of St. Francis
receiving the stigmata (examples)

3.5) Andrew is traditionally symbolized by a saltire, which became a surreptitious expression of intellectual autonomy and criticism, contrasting with the (decadent) crossed golden and silver keys of Peter (the papacy).

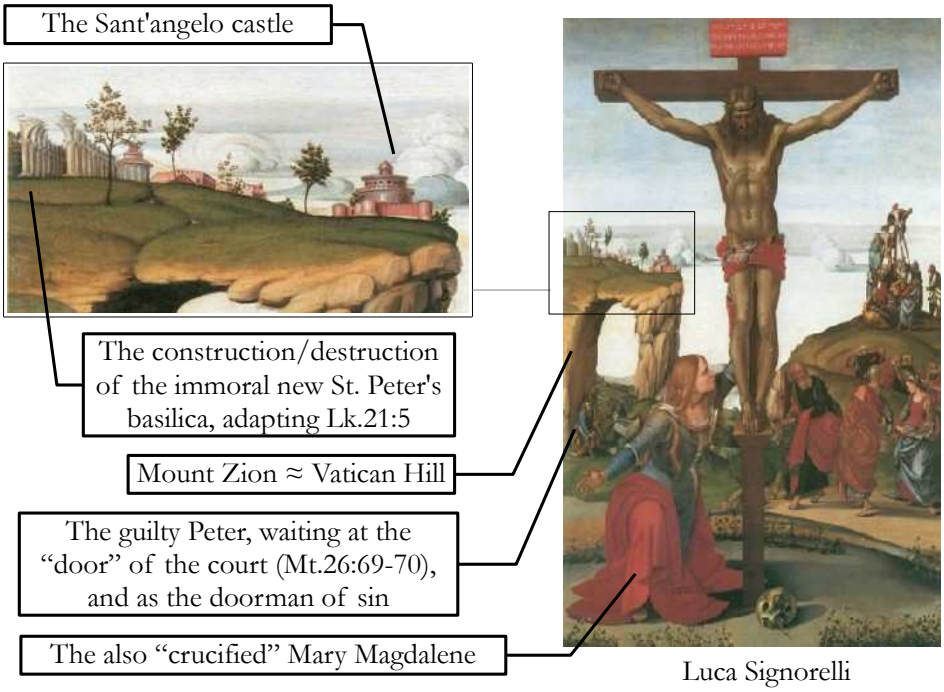
3.6) It is visible that the bodies of Peter and Judas draw a saltire, denouncing the great sins of the high clergy of the Renaissance: the repression (the knife); the corruption (the purse of Judas); and the lust (the ambiguous gesture towards Mary Magdalene).



Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper (det.)

In the copy of the *The Last Supper* by Giampietrino (Leonardo's disciple), it is clearly visible that the purse of Judas has elements resembling two keys.

3.7) Indeed, it was by its resourceful ambiguities and multiple meanings that Leonardo's *Last Supper* was considered an important reference among the artists of that time, such as Luca Signorelli, who adapted and developed some concepts.


The Sant'angelo castle
The construction/destruction of the immoral new St. Peter's basilica, adapting Lk.21:5
Mount Zion ≈ Vatican Hill
The guilty Peter, waiting at the "door" of the court (Mt.26:69-70), and as the doorman of sin
The also "crucified" Mary Magdalene

Luca Signorelli
Crucifixion with Mary Magdalene

3.8) Nevertheless, it was one of Leonardo's greatest rivals, Michelangelo Buonarroti, who defiantly sought inspiration in the *Last Supper*, in order to overcome Leonardo and to encode the greatest criticism of the high clergy.

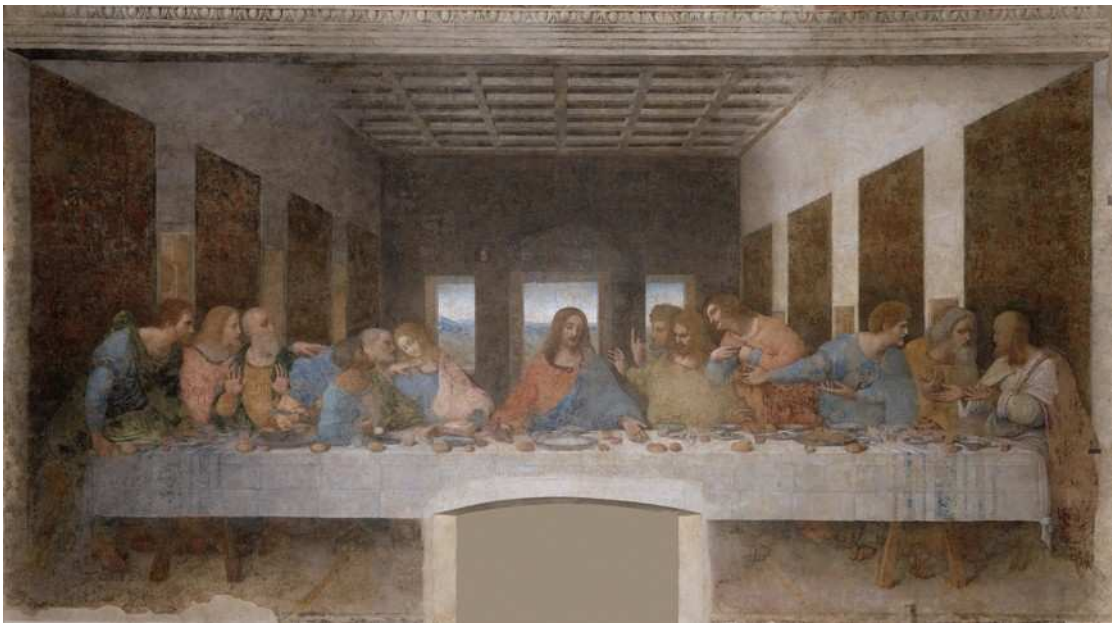
3.9) Later, Daniele Crespi would merge the work of Leonardo and the autonomous adaptation of Michelangelo.

Daniele Crespi
The Last Supper (det.)

3.10) Other details support the interpretations here presented, such as the progression from shadow (earthly life) to light (redemptive death, eternal life), etc.

Conclusion

In fact, ingenious works such as the *Last Supper* were intellectual assertions and competitive creations among the humanist community, as well as veiled expressions of the beliefs of those free-thinkers.



Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper

* Focusing on some of the most important issues, this paper summarizes the decipherment of Leonardo's *Last Supper* in the preceding year by the same author, and integrates a wider initiative, covering many other artworks from the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries.

[2012]

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Deconstructing Caravaggio and Velázquez

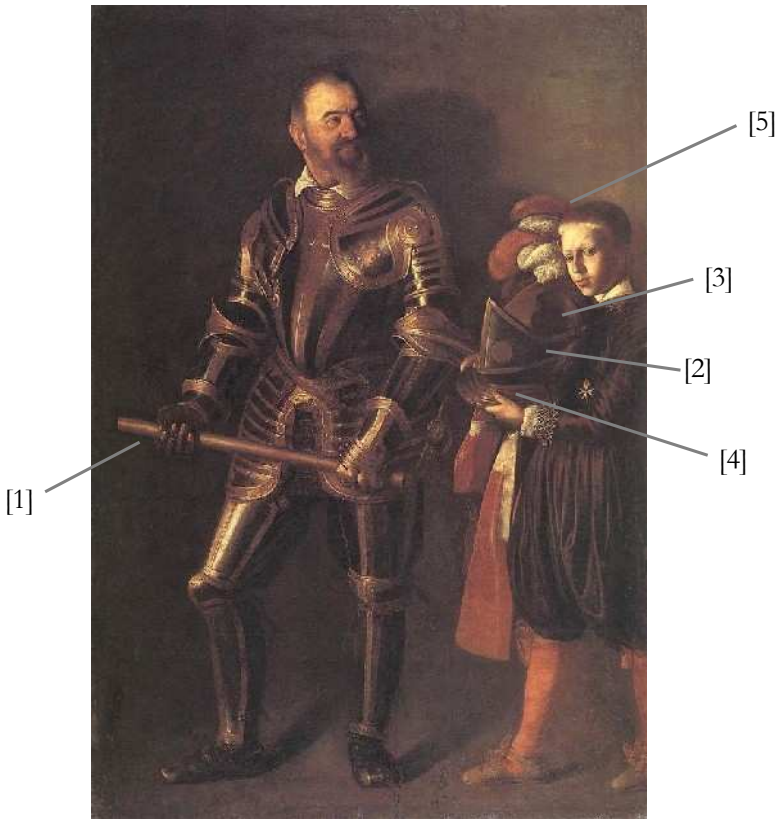
Paulo Martins Oliveira

Caravaggio (1571-1610)

The use of superimposed layers of meaning had been evolving significantly since the 15th century, and one of the major contributors would be Michelangelo da Caravaggio, who employed different methods to create particularly elaborate paintings.

One of those solutions was the deconstruction of elements, which can be exemplified by one of his simplest but always ingenious works, titled *The portrait of Alof of Wignacourt* (Louvre).

Supposedly, Caravaggio depicted a great military commander, but on a deeper level he portrayed an executioner.



Caravaggio
The portrait of Alof of Wignacourt

So, Alof holds the staff of command as if it was an axe [1], and its (deconstructed) blade [2] is in the helmet [3], which in turn symbolizes a decapitated head on a plate [4].

Even the feathers [5] of the helmet are "tongues" insultingly directed at the armoured man, expressing Caravaggio's true opinion about him.

This kind of device was used by the same painter to design more complex works, such as *The sacrifice of Isaac* (Uffizi), which actually conceals a completely different narrative.

Caravaggio
The sacrifice of Isaac

(det.)

Indeed, this image functions as a frame of a sequence, containing deconstructed elements that allow to decode the antecedents and the conclusion of the superimposed story[1].

Thus, deepening an already protean concept of art, Caravaggio became a reference for a new generation of painters.

1 Besides the deconstruction, Caravaggio also used other devices, such as the deformation. For instance, a closer look reveals that the arm of the supposed Isaac was artificially bent, in order to also hold the knife (sharing the hand of the older character. The connection is strategically hidden by the hand of the supposed angel). This acts as a frame inside another frame, and allows to read the underlying narrative.

Diego Velázquez (1599-1660)

Profoundly influenced by the works of Caravaggio (as well as of Botticelli and others), the Spanish painter Diego Velázquez also created elaborate works, such as *The portrait of Prince Balthasar with a dwarf* (Museum of Fine Arts of Boston).

Velázquez
The portrait of Prince Balthasar with a dwarf

In this painting Balthasar symbolizes his own father, King Philip IV of Spain, while the "dwarf" represents the Count-Duke of Olivares, who actually was running the country, reason why he holds the "sceptre" and the imperial "orb".

The Count-Duke of Olivares
"crowned" with a concealed vulture,
also by Velázquez

Particularly interesting is the pillow with the supposed hat on the right. Here Velázquez shows how he deconstructed some elements across different works, for in reality he depicted the axe of a halberd, as seen in *The surrender of Breda* (Prado).

Velázquez
The surrender of Breda

The feathers of the hat form the suggestion of a head of a dog (caricature), which was a traditional sarcastic symbol of the Habsburg/Spanish domination in the Netherlands, and in fact, throughout several of his paintings, Diego Velázquez consistently presented his opinion about the ongoing war in the Dutch territories.

In conclusion these few examples demonstrate the great versatility of this kind of multi-layered art, whose analysis requires different types of approach.

[2012]

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The dynamic concept of Sandro Botticelli

Paulo Martins Oliveira

Following and deepening recent developments presented by Flemish painters, who were exploring the potential of oil painting, several artists of the Italian Renaissance created complex works with multiple layers of meaning.

One of the main experts in this protean method was Sandro Botticelli (ca.1445-1510), who superimposed images using compromise solutions, in order to encipher certain kinds of messages, such as criticisms about the high clergy.

Besides his larger works (e.g. *Primavera*, *The Birth of Venus*, etc.), Botticelli also expressed that concept in smaller pictures, and a good example can be seen in the *Christ Praying in the Garden of Gethsemane* (Granada, Spain).

Here, in a superficial layer, Jesus accepts His tragic destiny, symbolized by the chalice (Lk.22:42-43), while the apostles are sleeping (from left to right: Peter, John and James).

Sandro Botticelli
Christ Praying in the Garden of Gethsemane

However, in a second layer of meaning, the same figures assume different interpretations, forming an underlying narrative.

Thus, on the left, Peter is at the "door" of the Jewish court, where he denied knowing Christ three times (Mt.26:69-70).

Sandro Botticelli
Christ Praying in the Garden of Gethsemane (det.)

A variant of this artifice was already materialized by the same Botticelli in *The Birth of Christ* (Florence), in which Peter (in the role of Joseph[1]) is also at the "door" of the inquisitorial court, represented by the abnormal saddle.

The saddle in *The Birth of Christ* represents an entrance, like the one that Botticelli depicted in the *Annunciation of San Marino della Scalla* (Florence, detail on the right).

Other examples illustrating the guilty Peter (i.e. the papacy), by Botticelli, Signorelli and Bosch.

1 The relatively neutral figure of Joseph was often used to subtly introduce either symbolic self-portraits of painters, or censurable Peters (the papacy).

Continuing the analysis of the work today in Granada, next to Peter there is a healthy tree, which symbolizes that Christ's martyrdom has not yet really begun.

On the other side, unlike Peter, James the Greater has a positive connotation, and here he expresses the grief of Mary Magdalene at the base of the "cross". This trimmed tree also represents the torture and the agony that Jesus had suffered in the meantime.

Once again, Sandro Botticelli created a symbolic link with other works, in this case by adapting the picture usually known as *Crucifixion with Penitent Magdalene and Angel* (U. Harvard).

det. (Granada)

det. (U. Harvard)

At the centre of the painting in Granada, John (Christ's favourite apostle) plays the role of the dead Jesus, while the plant immediately behind represents the Virgin Mary, creating the suggestion of a "Pietà".

det. (Granada)

Sandro Botticelli
Lamentation over the dead Christ (det.)

Behind all these figures, the fence marks the separation between the world of the living and the world of the dead.

So, on the other side, the resurrected Messiah has already left the tomb and now returns the "chalice", after having fulfilled His duty.

det. (Granada)

Christ's wrists form an Andrew's cross (saltire), which became a symbol commonly used by several artists to express criticisms regarding the "Church of Peter" (the Holy See).

On the other hand, by presenting Jesus on top of a hill (having nearby Peter, John and James), this image also evokes the first transfiguration (Mk.9:2), as well as the final one, traditionally associated with the ascension of Christ to His Father, after the resurrection.

Example of an ascension/transfiguration
Rembrandt
The Ascension of Christ

As one can see, by superimposing narratives on the same image, Botticelli conceived a versatile piece of art, which is a telling example of his dynamic ingenuity.

[2012]

Extracted from
Separata 1
Ed. Português + English
ISBN: 978-1479248100
2.ª edição / 2nd edition
Setembro / September, 2012

A ADORAÇÃO DOS MAGOS, DE BOTTICELLI

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THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI, OF BOTTICELLI

Sandro Botticelli
A Adoração dos Magos
The Adoration of the Magi

Pintada por Sandro Botticelli e actualmente exibida na Galleria degli Uffizi (Florença), a *Adoração dos Magos* é na verdade uma das mais importantes obras da História da Arte, pois foi aqui que Botticelli começou verdadeiramente a experimentar e ampliar os modelos simbólicos flamengos, que mais tarde consolidaria na *Primavera*.

Apesar da falta de registos escritos, é geralmente aceite que a obra tenha sido pintada por volta de 1475, porque em Janeiro do ano seguinte Guasparre del Lama (que encomendara o quadro) fora condenado por fraude, pela guilda dos cambistas de Florença, tendo presumivelmente caído em desgraça, falecendo poucos anos depois, em 1481.

—

Painted by Sandro Botticelli and currently exhibited at the Galleria degli Uffizi (Florence), the Adoration of the Magi is actually one of the most important paintings in the History of Art, for it was here that Botticelli started to really experiment and expand the Flemish symbolic models, which he would later consolidate in the *Primavera*.

Despite the lack of known records, it is generally accepted that the work was painted around 1475, because in January of the following year Guasparre del Lama (who commissioned the painting) was convicted for fraud by the Florentine guild of money-changers, and presumably fell in disgrace, dying a few years later, in 1481.

Todavia, esta suposição não toma em conta o novo contexto político e social surgido em 1478, após a grande conspiração contra os governantes Medici, organizada pela família rival dos Pazzi, com o apoio tácito da Santa Sé.

As tentativas de assassinato ocorreram em 26 de Abril de 1478.

Lorenzo o Magnífico escapou por pouco, mas não o seu irmão mais novo, o popular Giuliano de' Medici, morto nessa ocasião.

Lorenzo e a família Medici mantiveram o poder, e exacerbando o clima emocional, um mês depois nascia Giulio di Giuliano, o único e póstumo filho do assassinado Medici (que não casara com Fioretta Gorini, a mãe de Giulio di Giuliano).

—

However, this assumption does not takes into account the new political and social context emerged in 1478, after the great conspiracy against the Medici rulers, organized by the rival Pazzi family, with the tacit agreement of the Holy See.

The assassination attempts took place on 26 April 1478.

Lorenzo the Magnificent barely escaped alive, but not his younger brother, the popular Giuliano de' Medici, murdered on that occasion.

Lorenzo and the Medici family remain in power, and exacerbating the emotional atmosphere, a month later was born Giulio di Giuliano, the only and posthumous son of the murdered Medici (who had not married Fioretta Gorini, the mother of Giulio di Giuliano).

O recém-nascido (que um dia viria a ser o papa Clemente VII) foi imediatamente colocado sob a protecção do seu tio Lorenzo o Magnífico, enquanto a Casa dos Medici e seus aliados procurava determinar a amplitude da conspiração, de modo a punir as famílias desleais.

Nesta altura, Lorenzo tinha já vários filhos próprios, e cerca de um ano depois nasceu o seu mais novo, baptizado como Giuliano, em honra do tio assassinado.

De facto, uma análise iconológica da *Adoração dos Magos* de Botticelli pode claramente demonstrar que esta obra expressa o mencionado contexto histórico.

—

The newborn (who one day would be Pope Clement VII) was immediately placed under the protection of his uncle Lorenzo the Magnificent, while the Medici House and their allies tried to determine the extent of the conspiracy, in order to punish the disloyal families.

At this time, Lorenzo the Magnificent already had several children of his own, and about a year later his youngest was born, named Giuliano, after his murdered uncle.

In fact, an iconological analysis of Botticelli's *Adoration of the Magi* can clearly demonstrate that this artwork expresses the mentioned historical context.

Primeiro que tudo, como era comum naquele tempo, as pinturas representando o Menino Jesus tinham por intenção celebrar nascimentos contemporâneos de varões e herdeiros, e usualmente este tipo de trabalhos apenas era encomendado ao fim de vários meses ou mesmo um ano após os partos, muito provavelmente devido às altas taxas de mortalidade infantil.

Por exemplo, Lorenzo o Magnífico vira morrer os seus dois primeiros filhos masculinos (gémeos), pouco depois dos nascimentos.

Por outro lado, o novo contexto originado pela grande conspiração tornara praticamente irrelevantes questões como a prévia condenação de Guasparre del Lama, o qual aproveitou a oportunidade para demonstrar aos Medici a sua lealdade e a da sua família.

A obra encomendada a Sandro Botticelli é um testemunho de tal declaração.

—

First of all, as it was common at that time, the paintings depicting the Jesus Child intend to celebrate contemporary births of male children and heirs, and usually this kind of work was commissioned only several months or even a year after the births, most likely due to the high rates of infant mortality.

For instance, Lorenzo the Magnificent saw his two first male sons (twins) die soon after their birth.

On the other hand, the new context originated by the great conspiracy has made practically irrelevant issues such as the previous conviction of Guasparre del Lama, who seized the opportunity to show his loyalty and of his family to the Medici rulers.

The picture commissioned to Sandro Botticelli is a demonstration of such statement.

Portanto, a pintura homenageia a poderosa família de governantes, reunindo os seus ilustres membros e cortesãos, quer os vivos, quer os mortos.

O Menino simboliza não só Cristo, mas também o recém-nascido Giulio di Giuliano, a receber as boas-vindas do grande patriarca Cosimo de' Medici (já falecido), conhecido como "Pater Patriae" (Pai da Pátria).

Atrás de Cosimo encontra-se o seu neto e actual governante Lorenzo o Magnífico, olhando para aquela cena principal.

No lado oposto, estando no correspondente lugar simétrico, encontra-se a infeliz figura do irmão de Lorenzo, Giuliano, o assassinado pai do recém-nascido.

—

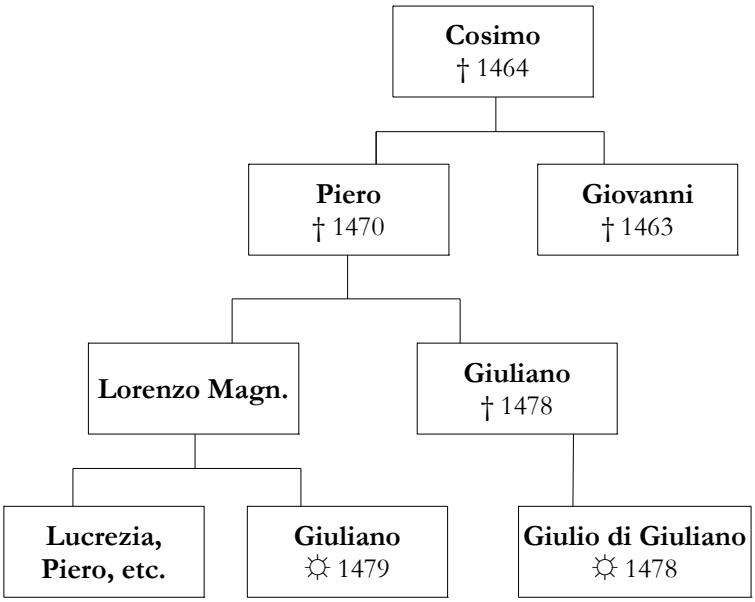
Thus, the artwork honours the powerful family of rulers, gathering its illustrious members and courtiers, both the living and the dead.

The Child symbolizes not only Christ but also the newborn Giulio di Giuliano, welcomed by the great patriarch Cosimo de' Medici (already deceased), known as "Pater Patriae" (Father of the Fatherland).

Behind Cosimo stands his grandson and current ruler Lorenzo the Magnificent, looking up at the main scene.

On the opposite side, standing in the corresponding symmetrical place, there is the gloomy figure of Lorenzo's brother, Giuliano, the murdered father of the newborn.

Medici


Cosimo
† 1464
Piero
† 1470
Giovanni
† 1463
Lorenzo Magn.
Giuliano
† 1478
Lucrezia,
Piero, etc.
Giuliano
☼ 1479
Giulio di Giuliano
☼ 1478

Atrás de Giuliano, uma figura ajoelhada apresenta características andróginas, provavelmente representando Fioretta Gorini, a mãe natural de Giulio di Giuliano. Ela olha para o seu filho à distância, ao mesmo tempo que chora a trágica morte do Medici. Na verdade, a atmosfera da pintura é quase lutuosa.

Junto daquele Menino, o referido Cosimo é o primeiro "mago", enquanto os outros dois estão em baixo, nomeadamente os seus filhos (também falecidos), Piero o Gotoso e Giovanni, respectivamente pai e tio de Lorenzo e Giuliano de' Medici.

Mesmo aqui existe uma relação simétrica entre o primeiro mago (Cosimo) e os outros dois (seus filhos). O desnivelamento demonstra que o "Pater Patriae" não tem paralelo, mas Botticelli compensou ao trazer Piero o Gotoso (pai de Lorenzo e de Giuliano) para o centro da composição.

—

Behind Giuliano, a kneeled figure shows androgynous features, likely representing Fioretta Gorini, the natural mother of Giulio di Giuliano. She looks at her son from the distance, and at the same time she mourns the assassinated Medici. Actually, the atmosphere of the picture is almost mournful.

Next to that Child, the mentioned Cosimo is the first "magus", while the other two are in the foreground, namely his sons (also deceased), Piero the Gouty and Giovanni, respectively father and uncle of Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici.

Even here there is a symmetrical relation between the first magus (Cosimo) and the other two (his sons). The unlevelling states that the "Pater Patriae" is unmatchable, but Botticelli compensated by bringing Piero (Lorenzo's and Giuliano's father) to the centre of the composition.

Prosseguindo a análise, à direita e à esquerda encontram-se duas figuras parecidas, simetricamente colocadas e olhando para o espectador, nomeadamente Guasparre del Lama e o seu próprio herdeiro, o qual está junto do governante, simbolicamente assegurando que a família Del Lama continuará no futuro a ser leal aos Medici.

No canto direito, o próprio Sandro Botticelli devolve o olhar (como era usual nos auto-retratos dos artistas e nas representações dos que encomendavam as pinturas).

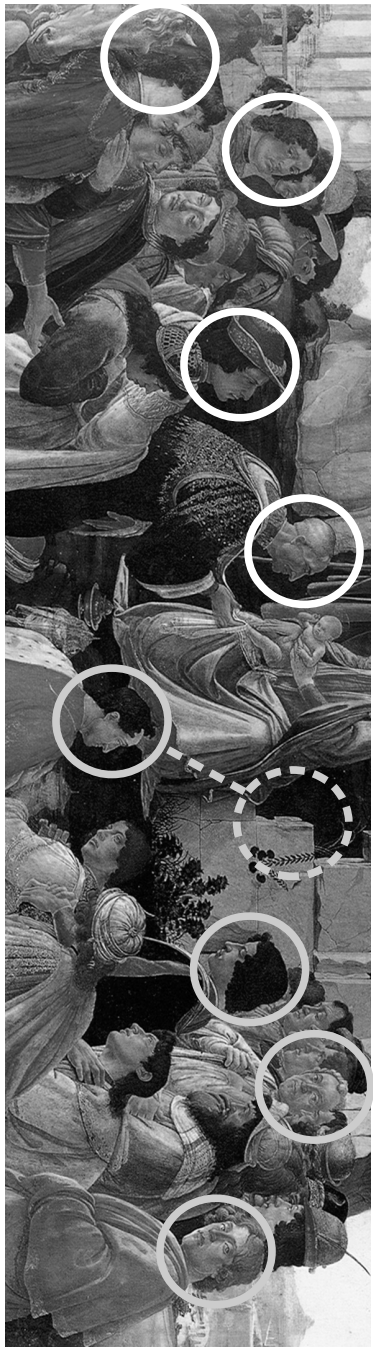
Aparentemente numa posição de destaque, o papel de Botticelli é na verdade mitigado, não só porque ele está no lado direito (de facto à esquerda da Virgem e do Menino), mas especialmente porque se encontra em directa correspondência com dois cavalos.

—

Continuing the analysis, on the right and on the left there are two alike figures symmetrically placed, both gazing at the viewer, namely Guasparre del Lama and his own heir, who his near the ruler, symbolically assuring that the Del Lama family will continue to be loyal to the Medici in the future.

On the bottom right, Sandro Botticelli himself also returns the gaze, as it was usual in the self-portraits of the artists (and in the depictions of those who commissioned the paintings).

Apparently in a prominent position, Botticelli's role is actually mitigated, not only because he stands on the right side (in fact on the left of the Virgin and the Child), but especially because he stands in direct correspondence with two horses.



Sandro Botticelli
A Adoração dos Magos
The Adoration of the Magi
(det.)

De facto, para compreender plenamente este tipo de composição axial, é necessário ter em conta as conexões simétricas entre as duas metades.

Quanto aos cavalos, existe também uma ligação simbólica aos dois jovens irmãos que se encontram junto deles, constituindo o artifício mais engenhoso nesta obra de arte, reforçando o posicionamento simétrico do pintor no lado oposto.

Estes dois irmãos (Lorenzo e Giovanni Pierfrancesco) estão a ser ensinados pelo humanista Angelo Poliziano, o qual salvara a vida de Lorenzo o Magnífico no fatídico dia do ataque organizado pelos Pazzi. Por isso, Angelo Poliziano destaca-se atrás do grande governante.

—

Indeed, to fully understand this type of axial composition, it is necessary to take into account the symmetrical connections between the two halves.

As to the horses, there is also a symbolic link to the young brothers next to them, constituting the most ingenious device in this artwork, reinforcing the symmetrical positioning of the painter on the other side.

Those two young brothers (Lorenzo and Giovanni Pierfrancesco) are being taught by the humanist Angelo Poliziano, who saved the life of Lorenzo the Magnificent on the fatidic day of the assault organized by the Pazzi. Because of this, Angelo Poliziano stands out behind the great ruler.

Em conclusão, a composição planeada por Sandro Botticelli mostra que esta pintura é uma demonstração de lealdade por parte da família Del Lama aos governantes Medici, num período particularmente sensível.

Apesar de Giulio di Giuliano ter nascido em 1478, provavelmente a obra foi finalizada em 1479, considerando que este género de trabalhos não era imediatamente encomendado.

Nesta perspectiva, beneficiando de uma coincidência, a pintura poderá também celebrar o novo filho de Lorenzo, nascido em Março de 1479.

Em todo o caso, alguns aspectos da obra (como a postura do Medici assassinado e da figura ajoelhada atrás de si) indicam que o recém-nascido ali representado procura sobretudo evocar a "miraculosa" continuidade do mártir Giuliano de' Medici.

—

In conclusion, the composition planned by Sandro Botticelli shows that this painting is a demonstration of loyalty from the Del Lama family to the Medici rulers, in a very sensitive period.

Although Giulio di Giuliano was born in 1478, likely the painting was finished in 1479, considering that this kind of paintings was not immediately commissioned.

In this perspective, enjoying a coincidence, the picture may also celebrate the new son of Lorenzo, born in March 1479.

Nevertheless, some aspects of the painting (like the posture of the murdered Medici and the kneeled figure behind him) indicate that the depicted newborn child mainly aims to evoke the "miraculous" continuity of the martyr Giuliano de' Medici.

Extracted from
Separata 1
Ed. Português + English
ISBN: 978-1479248100
2.ª edição / 2nd edition
Setembro / September, 2012

A Punição de Coré (e dos Pazzi)

—

The Punishment of Korah (and of the Pazzi)

Em 1478, a família florentina dos Pazzi liderou uma conspiração contra os governantes Medici, de que resultou a morte de Giuliano de' Medici, irmão de Lorenzo o Magnífico.

O papa Sisto IV foi acusado de envolvimento com os Pazzi, e nos dois anos seguintes o Estado de Florença esteve em guerra com a Santa Sé.

Nesta fase, em Florença, Sandro Botticelli foi incumbido de pintar nos edifícios dos tribunais imagens vingativas relativas aos Pazzi e aos seus cúmplices directos, alguns deles já enforcados, enquanto outros estavam em fuga.

Estas pinturas foram posteriormente destruídas, mas entretanto Botticelli recebeu outra encomenda, esta particularmente surpreendente.

—

In 1478 the Florentine Pazzi family had led a conspiracy against the Medici rulers, resulting in the assassination Giuliano de' Medici, brother of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

Pope Sixtus IV was accused of being involved with the Pazzi, and in the following two years the Florentine State was at war with the Holy See.

In this period of time, in Florence, Botticelli was commissioned to paint in the court buildings revengeful images regarding the Pazzi and their direct accomplices, some of them already hanged, while others were on the run.

These paintings were later destroyed, but in the meantime Botticelli received another commission, this one particularly surprising.

Sandro Botticelli
A Punição de Coré
The Punishment of Korah

De facto, após as tréguas entre Lorenzo de Medici e o papa Sisto IV, este último decidiu diplomaticamente convidar alguns artistas florentinos para pintar diversos episódios relativos às vidas de Moisés e de Cristo, nas paredes laterais da sua grande Capela "Sistina".

Botticelli tornou-se responsável por três frescos, os quais mais tarde tiveram uma profunda influência nos trabalhos de Michelangelo para a mesma Capela, uma vez que aqueles três frescos têm assuntos sobrepostos.

Este estudo foca o fresco intitulado *A Punição de Coré*, integrada na sequência da vida de Moisés (parede sul).

A pintura representa a revolta liderada por Coré contra Moisés e seu irmão Aarão, a qual é mencionada no Antigo Testamento (Nm.16:1--35).

—

Indeed, after the truce between Lorenzo the Magnificent and Pope Sixtus IV, this last one diplomatically decided to invite a few Florentine artists to paint several episodes regarding Moses' and Christ's lives on the lateral walls of his great "Sistine" Chapel.

Botticelli became responsible for three of the frescoes, which later would have a profound influence on Michelangelo's works in the same Chapel, since those three paintings have superimposed issues.

This study focuses the fresco entitled the *Punishment of Korah*, integrated in the sequence of Moses' life (southern wall).

The painting features the revolt led by Korah against Moses and his brother Aaron, which is mentioned in the Old Testament (Num. 16: 1-35).

Este fresco está subdividido em três grupos, formando uma progressão da direita para a esquerda, seguindo assim a sequência geral de toda a parede sul.

No primeiro grupo, os rebeldes concentram-se junto de Moisés e preparam-se para apedrejá-lo até à morte, mas Josué intervém e salva o líder.

No dia seguinte, os rebeldes por um lado, e Moisés e Aarão por outro, juntam-se novamente, todos eles segurando turíbulos, através dos quais Deus iria manifestar a Sua preferência.

Então, os turíbulos atacaram os rebeldes como um sinal de denúncia e traição, como é visível no grupo central.

Moisés tem aqui um bastão de comando, enquanto o seu irmão Aarão usa uma coroa similar a uma tiara papal.

—

This fresco is subdivided into three groups, forming a progression from right to left, following thus the general sequence of the whole southern wall.

In the first group, the rebels gather near Moses and prepare to stone him to death, but Joshua intervenes and saves the leader.

On the next day, the rebels by one side, and Moses and Aaron on the other, gather again, all of them holding censers, through which God would manifest His preference.

Then, the censers attacked the rebels as a sign of guilt and treason, as one can see in the central group.

Moses holds here a staff of command, while his brother Aaron uses a crown similar to a papal tiara.

Quer Moisés quer Aarão simbolizam Sisto IV e a autoridade temporal e espiritual da Santa Sé (também representada pelas chaves cruzadas de ouro e prata).

Finalmente, no outro lado, o terceiro grupo representa o castigo capital dos rebeldes, quando a terra se abriu para os engolir.

Contudo, analisando este fresco sob uma perspectiva iconológica, é possível concluir que Botticelli dissimulou aqui uma referência à conspiração liderada pelos Pazzi contra os dois irmãos Medici, Lorenzo e Giuliano.

Primeiramente, quanto ao grupo inicial, Botticelli homenageou aqui o seu amigo Angelo Poliziano (o "Josué"), o qual salvara a vida de Lorenzo o Magnífico, por sua vez sub-repticiamente associado a Moisés, o mais poderoso dos dois irmãos bíblicos.

—

Both Moses and Aaron symbolize Sixtus IV and the temporal and spiritual authority of the Holy See (also represented by the crossed golden and silver keys).

Finally, on the left, the third group depicts the capital punishment of the rebels, when the earth opened to swallow them.

However, analysing this fresco from an iconological point of view, it is possible to conclude that Botticelli veiled a reference to the conspiracy led by the Pazzi against the two Medici brothers, Lorenzo and Giuliano.

Firstly, about the initial group, Botticelli honoured here his friend Angelo Poliziano (the "Joshua"), who saved the life of Lorenzo the Magnificent, who in turn is surreptitiously associated with Moses, the most powerful of the two biblical brothers.

Efectivamente, aquele "Josué" até se parece com a figura de Angelo Poliziano na *Adoração dos Magos* (Florença, c.1479).

Nesta mesma lógica, porque Giuliano fora assassinado durante a revolta, o seu equivalente Aarão foi omitido deste grupo inicial.

Seguindo este raciocínio, e olhando de novo para a cena central, Moisés forma um par com um homem que executa um gesto similar.

Muito provavelmente, este último personagem representa Lorenzo o Magnífico, equiparado em prestígio a "Moisés", o qual na interpretação oficial representa o papa Sisto IV (tal como Aarão).

Aquelas duas figuras que se conectam formam uma simbólica árvore bifurcada, aludindo ao brasão de armas do papa Sisto IV, da família dos Rovere [carvalho].

—

Indeed, that "Joshua" even resembles the figure of Angelo Poliziano in the *Adoration of the Magi* (Florence, ca.1479).

In this same logic, because Giuliano was murdered during the rebellion, his equivalent Aaron was omitted from this initial group.

Following this same line of thought, and looking again at the central scene, Moses forms a pair with a man who makes a similar gesture.

Most likely, this last character represents Lorenzo the Magnificent, equated in prestige with "Moses", who in the official interpretation represents Pope Sixtus IV (like Aaron).

Those two connected figures form a symbolic bifurcated tree, alluding to the papal coat of arms of Sixtus IV, from the Rovere [oak] family.

Sandro Botticelli
A Punição de Coré
The Punishment of Korah
(det.)

Isto parece simbolizar a paz entre a Santa Sé e o Estado de Florença, como dois ramos "aliados" de uma mesma árvore.

Contudo, a mesma forma provavelmente também representa uma laranjeira, que é um dos símbolos artísticos dos governantes Medici (o que também explicará a cor das roupas de Lorenzo).

Acima, Aarão encontra-se junto de uma trágica figura, que cobre a sua face. Logicamente, este indivíduo simboliza o assassinado Giuliano, associado a Aarão (o qual por sua vez era irmão de Moisés, associado a Lorenzo, na mais profunda camada de significado).

Apesar do armistício estabelecido com a Santa Sé, a sub-reptícia presença de Giuliano lembra as culpas de Sisto IV, acusado de ter dado um consentimento tácito à conspiração dos Pazzi.

—

This seems to be an official symbol of peace between the Holy See and the Florentine State, as two "allied" branches of the same tree.

However, the same shape probably also represents an orange tree, which is one of the artistic symbols of the ruling Medici (which can also explain the colour of Lorenzo's clothes).

Above this double "tree", Aaron stands next to a tragic figure, which covers his face. Logically, this individual symbolizes the murdered Giuliano, associated with Aaron (who in turn is brother of Moses, associated with Lorenzo, in the deepest layer of meaning).

Despite the truce established with the Holy See, the surreptitious presence of Giuliano reminds the guilt of Pope Sixtus IV, accused of giving a tacit consent to the Pazzi conspiracy.

Para mais, verificando de novo o primeiro grupo à direita, a figura inicial claramente se assemelha a uma representação tradicional de S. Pedro (significando o papa Sisto IV). O seu cabelo contrasta directamente com os raios de luz na cabeça de Moisés, e isto pode explicar a tentativa de apedrejamento, pois pedra/rocha em latim é "petrus", isto é Pedro, ou por outras palavras, o papa em conluio com os Pazzi.

Mas retornando ao grupo central, o rebelde "Coré" (Pazzi) e os seus aliados directos estão a ser denunciados e atacados pelos próprios turíbulos, que se movem violentamente no ar e mostram partes metálicas semelhantes a flores, simbolizando Florença.

Finalmente, à esquerda, os rebeldes perdem o chão e são engolidos pela terra. Tal corresponde aos enforcamentos dos conspiradores em Florença (no grupo central, um dos rebeldes até parece ser estrangulado pelo seu turíbulo).

—

Furthermore, looking back at the first group on the right, the initial figure clearly resembles a traditional representation of St. Peter (meaning Pope Sixtus IV). His hair contrasts directly with the rays of light on Moses' head, and this can explain the stoning attempt, because stone/rock in Latin is "petrus", that is Peter, or in other words, Pope Sixtus colluding with the Pazzi.

But returning to the central group, the rebel "Korah" (Pazzi) and his direct allies are being denounced and attacked by their own censers, which swing violently in the air and show metallic parts similar to flowers, symbolizing Florence.

Finally, on the left, the rebels lose the ground and are swallowed by the earth. This corresponds to the hangings of the conspirators in Florence (in the central group, one of the rebels even seems to be strangled by his censer).

Leonardo da Vinci
O enforcamento de Bernardo Baroncelli
The hanging of Bernardo Baroncelli

Embora as pinturas de Botticelli para os edifícios dos tribunais tenham sido entretanto destruídas, sobreviveu um famoso desenho de Leonardo da Vinci que representa um desses homens executados.

No fresco para a Capela Sistina, também é lógica a ausência de Aarão neste grupo final, considerando que Giuliano fora assassinado. Por este crime, os sentenciados "perderam o chão" às ordens de Moisés (Lorenzo), ao contrário do relato bíblico, onde a ordem fora dada por Deus.

Ao mesmo tempo, alguns flutuam em finas nuvens, figurando os absolvidos e os aliados dos Medici, como as famílias Vespucci e Del Lama.

Para além disso, olhando uma vez mais para o grupo central, aquela figura dramática que cobre a face provavelmente também representa o próprio Sandro Botticelli.

—

Although the Botticelli's paintings for the Florentine court buildings were after destroyed, it survived a famous drawing by Leonardo da Vinci, representing one of those executed men.

In the fresco for the Sistine Chapel, also the omission of Aaron in that final group is logical, considering that Giuliano was assassinated. Due to this crime, the sentenced "lost their ground" on Moses' (Lorenzo's) orders, unlike the biblical version, where the command was given by God.

At the same time, some float on thin clouds, representing the acquitted and the allies of the Medici, like the Vespucci and the Del Lama families.

In addition, looking again at the central group, that dramatic figure covering his face likely also represents Sandro Botticelli himself.

Assim, Botticelli expressa a sua dor pela morte do sobreposto Giuliano de' Medici.

Com este expediente simbólico, o artista sublinhou a sua lealdade a Florença e a Lorenzo o Magnífico e sua família, discreta mas fortemente homenageada na Capela de Sisto.

De facto, após esta comissão, Botticelli regressou a Florença, onde continuou a trabalhar para os Medici e seus aliados.

Concluindo, a comparação entre a *Punição de Coré* e os eventos relativos ao assassinato de Giuliano permitem admitir que Botticelli tenha sobreposto as duas narrativas no mesmo fresco, revelando uma particular versatilidade artística e intelectual, a qual é importante para compreender a lógica da arte do Renascimento.

—

Thus, Botticelli expresses his grief for the death of the superimposed Giuliano de' Medici.

With this symbolic device, the artist underlined his loyalty to Florence and to Lorenzo the Magnificent and his family, discreetly but strongly honoured in the Chapel of Sixtus.

Indeed, after this commission, Botticelli returned to Florence, where he would continue to work for the Medici and their allies.

Concluding, the comparison between the *Punishment of Korah* and the events concerning Giuliano's assassination allows to admit that Botticelli superimposed the two narratives on the same fresco, showing a particular artistic and intellectual versatility, which is also important to understand the logic of the Renaissance art.

Extracted from
Separata 1
Ed. Português + English
ISBN: 978-1479248100
2.ª edição / 2nd edition
Setembro / September, 2012

A PAISAGEM DA *MONA LISA*

—

THE LANDSCAPE OF THE *MONA LISA*

Leonardo da Vinci
Mona Lisa
Mona Lisa

A pintura usualmente denominada como *Mona Lisa* é uma obra que deve ser interpretada em diferentes camadas de significado, as quais em todo caso operam harmoniosamente.

Este estudo visa especificamente o fundo da obra, o qual é também uma combinação de vários factores.

Desde logo, adaptando um conceito flamengo, aquela paisagem é uma fusão entre um cenário toscano e um bíblico.

Outros artistas italianos tinham desenvolvido ideias similares, como Benozzo Gozzoli, que na *Procissão do Rei Gaspar* sumarizou a cidade de Florença com um "palazzo" fortificado, o qual domina um grande jardim que compreende outras cidades ao fundo (o Estado de Florença).

—

The painting usually called as the *Mona Lisa* is a picture that should be interpreted on different layers of meaning, which nevertheless operate harmoniously.

This paper specifically addresses the background, which is also a combination of several factors.

Firstly, adapting a Flemish concept, that landscape is a merging between a Tuscany scenery and a biblical one.

Other Italian artists had developed similar ideas, like Benozzo Gozzoli, who in the *Procession of King Caspar* summarized the city of Florence as a fortified "palazzo", which dominates a large garden comprising other cities in the background (the Florentine State).

Quanto a Leonardo da Vinci, ele optou não por adaptar os jardins paradisíacos, mas as montanhas rochosas da Judeia, representando igualmente na parte superior um grande lago, ou reservatório de água.

Na verdade, ao longo da metade norte da Península Itálica, além de montanhas e vales, existem diversos lagos, simbolicamente associados ao Mar da Galileia, do qual parte o Rio Jordão, por sua vez simbolicamente associado ao Rio Arno (o rio de Florença).

Além disso, na *Mona Lisa* de Leonardo, à esquerda é visível uma estrada sinuosa, a qual representa o duro caminho da vida (como os labirintos em algumas catedrais góticas).

Contudo, a mesma forma é uma fusão de um "L" com um "S" espelhado, significando Leonardo e Salai (o seu assistente próximo).

—

As to Leonardo da Vinci, he opted not to adapt the heavenly gardens, but the rocky mountains of Judea, depicting also a large lake, or a water reservoir above.

Actually, along the northern half of the Italian Peninsula, besides mountains and valleys there are several lakes, symbolically associated with the Sea of Galilee, from which runs the river Jordan, which in turn is associated with the river Arno (the river of Florence).

In addition, in Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, on the left is visible a curvy road, which represents the hard path of life (like the mazes in some Gothic cathedrals).

However, the same form is a merging of an "L" and a reversed (mirror) "S", meaning Leonardo and Salai (his close assistant).

Existem outros exemplos contemporâneos que suportam esta interpretação, como o "N" espelhado no *Jardim das Delícias* de Bosch (Madrid), onde essa letra foi subtilmente adaptada na chave do abismo infernal (Ap.20:1-3), de modo a criticar sub-repticiamente o cliente Nassau (representante imperial dos Habsburgos).

Noutro trabalho (*Tentações de Santo Antão*, Lisboa), Bosch fundiu as letras "F" e "S" numa única forma, a qual discretamente identifica uma figura como o Habsburgo Filips de Schone (Filipe o Belo), outro alvo do artista.

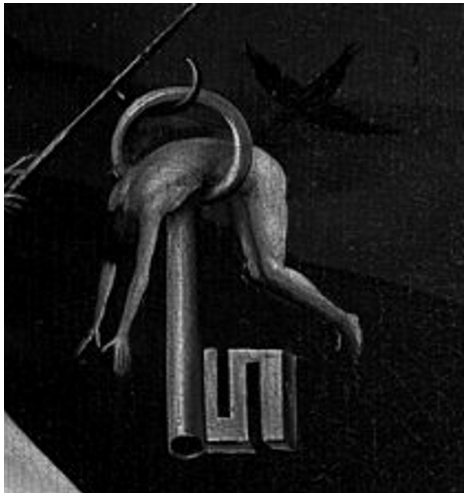
Acerca da *Mona Lisa*, também a observação de Silvano Vinceti de que existe um pequeno "L" e um "S" nos olhos da figura contribui significativamente para a noção de que este é um complexo exercício intelectual, tal como a relação entre este quadro e o retrato do próprio Leonardo (Turim), conforme apresentado por Lillian Schwartz.

—

There are other contemporary examples that support this interpretation, such as the reversed "N" in Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (Madrid), where that letter was subtly adapted in the key of the infernal abyss (Rev.20:1-3), in order to surreptitiously criticize the reprehensible Nassau client (deputy of the imperial Habsburgs).

In other work (*Temptation of St. Anthony*, Lisbon), Bosch merged the letters "F" and "S" into a single form, which discreetly identifies a figure as the Habsburg Filips de Schone (Philip the Handsome), another target of the artist.

About the *Mona Lisa*, also the observation by Silvano Vinceti that there are a small "L" and a "S" in the eyes of the figure contributes significantly to the notion that this artwork is a complex intellectual exercise, likewise the relation between this picture and the portrait of Leonardo himself (Turin), as presented by Lillian Schwartz.



Jheronimus Bosch
Jardim das Delícias
Garden of Earhly Delights
(det.)

Jheronimus Bosch
Tentações de Santo Antão
Tempation of St. Anthony
(det.)

Na verdade, a *Mona Lisa* é uma intrincada figura composta de diversas camadas, e existem ainda outros aspectos a ter em conta, que sistematicamente convergem na ideia de dualidade.

Por enquanto, no âmbito deste estudo, é necessário referir que a mencionada estrada "L/S" representa também a natural dimensão falível, enquanto a ponte no outro lado expressa a transição redentora para uma nova etapa, deixando para trás o mundo inferior da carne e do pecado.

É por esta razão que a ambígua ponte tem três grandes arcos evidentes (Cristo e os dois ladrões, simbolizando a Sua luta final de consciência), do mesmo modo que a *Última Ceia* (Milão) tem três aberturas atrás de Cristo e de Tiago Maior (projecção de Cristo).

—

Actually, the *Mona Lisa* is a intricate figure made of several layers, and there are even other aspects to take into account, which systematically converge on the idea of duality.

By now, in the scope of this paper, it is necessary to state that the mentioned road "L/S" represents also the natural fallible dimension, whereas the bridge on the other side expresses the redemptive transition to a new level, leaving behind the inferior world of flesh and sin.

It is for this reason that the ambiguous bridge has three evident large arches (Christ and the two thieves, symbolizing His final struggle of conscience), in the same way that the *Last Supper* (Milan) has three openings behind Christ and James the Greater (projection of Christ).

Por seu turno, tal como o "palazzo" fortificado na obra de Gozzoli representa Florença, também a ponte na *Mona Lisa* parece sintetizar a mesma cidade (veja-se a gravura *A Vista com a Corrente*).

Imediatamente a seguir à ponte, no outro lado existe uma pequena e subtil construção vazia, que simboliza o túmulo de Cristo e a Sua ressurreição, assemelhando-se por exemplo ao "túmulo" na obra de Botticelli *Cristo orando no Jardim de Getsémani* (Granada).

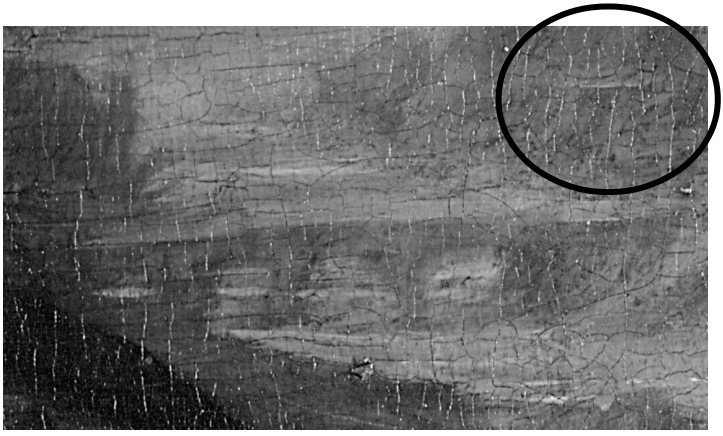
Efectivamente, a ressurreição era considerada um novo nascimento, tal como o prévio baptismo. Neste contexto, não é impossível que o reservatório no topo e o curso de água à esquerda expressem o baptismo de Jesus, e o consequente progresso para uma situação mais elevada, consumada com a Sua morte (transição).

—

On the other hand, in the same manner that the fortified "palazzo" in Gozzoli's painting represents Florence, also the bridge in the *Mona Lisa* appears to synthesize the same city (see the engraving *The View with the Chain*).

Immediately next to the bridge, on the other side there is a subtle, empty small construction, which symbolizes Christ's tomb and resurrection, for instance, resembling the "tomb" in Botticelli's *Christ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane* (Granada).

Indeed, the resurrection was considered a new birth, like the previous baptism. In this context, is not impossible that the reservoir on the top, and the water flow on the left, express the baptism of Jesus, and the consequent evolution to a higher condition, consummated with His death (transition).



Leonardo da Vinci
Mona Lisa
Mona Lisa
(det.)

Isto explica a elevação do lado direito da paisagem, quebrando a continuidade do horizonte.

Uma variante desta ideia pode ser encontrada na *Última Ceia* de Leonardo, com a iluminação da parede direita, ou no anterior *Nascimento de Vénus* (Florença), de Sandro Botticelli, tal como no *Retábulo Bardi* (Berlim), também por Botticelli, onde João Baptista à esquerda tem a face de um sátiro (representando a dimensão falível de Cristo), evoluindo simbolicamente através do baptismo para o sábio João Evangelista, o qual fora o autor da Revelação Final (Apocalipse), sendo também considerado como João o Apóstolo, o favorito discípulo de Jesus.

Em conclusão, a paisagem da *Mona Lisa* é uma composição dinâmica, formada por múltiplas camadas de significado, actuando em conjugação.

—

This explains the uplift of the right side of the landscape, breaking the natural continuity of the horizon.

A variant of this idea can be found , among other examples, in Leonardo's *Last Supper*, in which the right wall is lighted, or in the early *Birth of Venus* (Florence), of Sandro Botticelli, just as in the *Bardi Altarpiece* (Berlin), also by Botticelli, where John the Baptist on the left has the face of a satyr (representing Christ's fallible dimension), symbolically evolving through baptism to the wise John the Evangelist, who was the author of the Final Revelation (Apocalypse), being also regarded as John the Apostle, Jesus' favourite disciple.

In conclusion, the landscape of the *Mona Lisa* is a dynamic composition, formed by multiple layers of meaning acting in combination.

Extracted from
Separata 1
Ed. Português + English
ISBN: 978-1479248100
2.ª edição / 2nd edition
Setembro / September, 2012

MICHELANGELO E O *LAOCOONTE*

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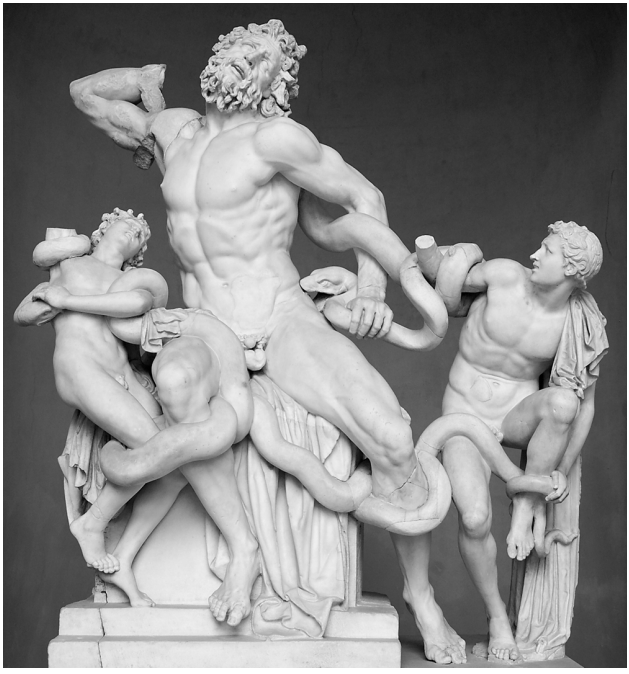
MICHELANGELO AND THE *LAOCOÖN*



Laocoonte e seus filhos
Laocoön and his sons

Em 1516 Michelangelo Buonarroti foi um dos primeiros a ver um monumental grupo escultórico, acabado de desenterrar numa vinha em Roma.

O grupo foi designado *Laocoonte e seus filhos*, que estão a ser estrangulados mortalmente por duas serpentes. Desta forma, os deuses puniram aquele sacerdote troiano e os seus filhos por tentarem resistir à pré-determinada vitória grega sobre Tróia.

Estes figuras que se contorcem em sofrimento tiveram um profundo impacto em Michelangelo, que imediatamente expressou esta influência nos trabalhos seguintes.

Efectivamente, a importância do *Laocoonte* deve ser ainda mais realçada do que já é, pois Michelangelo sistematicamente adaptou essa poderosa imagem nas suas próprias figuras dramáticas, tanto em pinturas como em esculturas.

—

In 1506 Michelangelo Buonarroti was one of the first to see a monumental sculptural group, just unearthed in a Roman vineyard.

The group was called the *Laocoön and his sons*, who were being strangled to death by two serpents. By this way the gods punished that Trojan priest and his sons for trying to resist the predetermined Greek victory over Troy.

Those contorting, suffering figures had a profound impact on Michelangelo, who immediately expressed that influence throughout his next works.

In fact, the importance of the *Laocoön* should be highlighted more than it already is, for Michelangelo systematically adapted that powerful image in his own dramatic figures, both in paintings and in sculptures.

Assim, em alguns casos, ele representou serpentes, mas na maioria das situações transformou-as em faixas que prendem ou embaraçam as figuras.

Após a descoberta do *Laocoonte* em 1506, o grande projecto seguinte de Michelangelo foi o tecto da Capela Sistina, onde a massiva serpente do pecado original quase estrangula a própria árvore (sexta secção).

Também lembrando o grupo do *Laocoonte*, alguns "ignudi" estão enredados ou lutam com as faixas usadas para manter os medalhões na posição vertical.

Por seu turno, numa pequena ilha rochosa da *Grande Inundação* (oitava secção do tecto), é possível observar um enterro simbólico, no qual "Cristo" está a ser segurado por faixas.

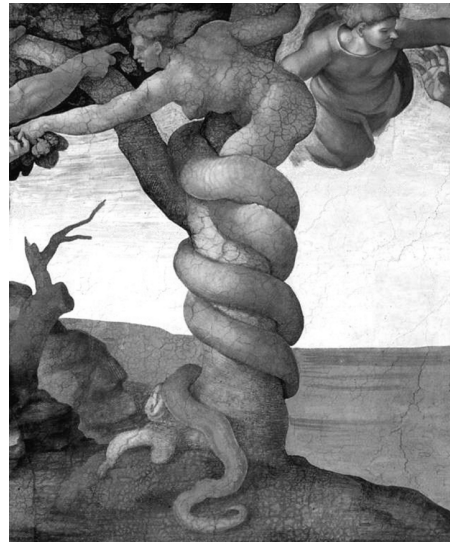
—

Thus, in some cases, he featured serpents, but in most situations he transformed them into straps that constrain the figures.

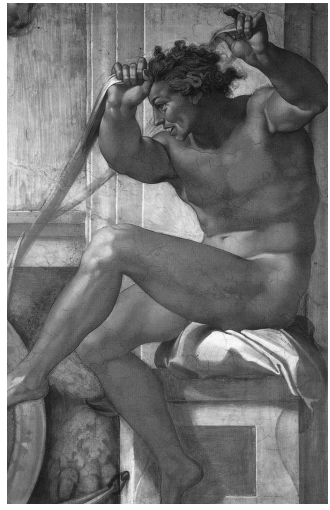
After the discover of the *Laocoön* in 1506, the following major work of Michelangelo was the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, where the massive serpent of the original sin almost strangles the tree itself (sixth section).

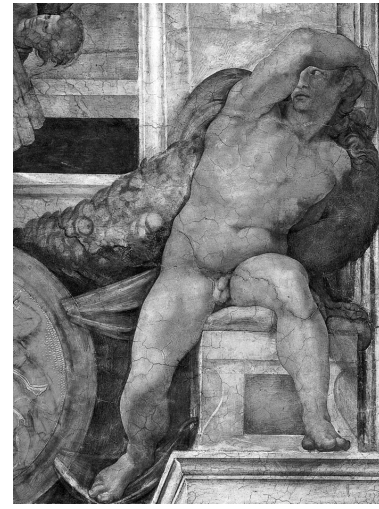
Also resembling the *Laocoön* group, several "ignudi" are entangled or struggling with the straps used to keep the medallions in a vertical position.

By its turn, in a small rocky island of the *Great Flood* (eighth section of the ceiling), one can see a symbolic entombment, in which "Christ" is being secured by straps.



Michelangelo Buonarroti
Tecto da Capela Sistina
Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel
(dets.)





Este mesmo conceito foi adoptado na "Sepultação" exibida na National Gallery de Londres, obra que foi deixada inacabada, e cuja datação é incerta. Deste modo, o mencionado detalhe torna possível sugerir que o trabalho tenha sido executado por volta de 1507-1508, ficando incompleto devido aos preparativos para as pinturas na Capela Sistina.

De facto, uma situação idêntica ocorreria poucos anos depois, quando Michelangelo foi obrigado a abreviar os seus trabalhos no túmulo do papa Júlio II, de modo a desenvolver novos trabalhos prioritários na Igreja de San Lorenzo, em Florença (Capela dos Medici).

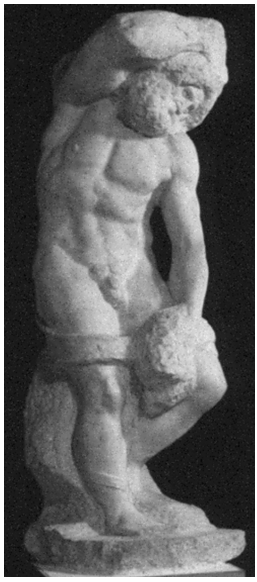
A fazê-lo, deixou incompletos os seus famosos "escravos", os quais na verdade apresentam semelhanças com as figuras aprisionadas do *Laocoonte e seus filhos*.

—

The same concept was adopted in *The Entombment*, exhibited at the National Gallery of London, picture that was left unfinished and whose dating is uncertain. Thus, the mentioned detail makes it possible to suggest that this work is from around 1507-1508, and was left unfinished due to the preparations for the paintings in the Sistine Chapel.

Indeed, a similar situation happened a few years later, when Michelangelo was compelled to abbreviate his works for the tomb of Pope Julius II, in order to develop new priority projects for the San Lorenzo Church, in Florence (Medici Chapel).

By doing so, he left unfinished his famous "slaves", which actually show similarities with those constrained figures of the *Laocoön and his sons*.



Michelangelo Buonarroti
Bearded slave
Escravo de barba

Para além disso, considerando os projectos originais para o túmulo de Júlio II, apresentados por Charles de Tolnay, é até visível que a estátua do papa fora originalmente projectada para ser segura por faixas, reforçando que todos estes elementos derivam de uma fonte comum.

Entretanto, agora de regresso a Florença, Michelangelo projectou e esculpiu os túmulos do Medici Lorenzo (duque de Urbino) e Giuliano (duque de Nemours), incluindo estátuas complementares, como a *Aurora*, com uma faixa que lhe comprime o peito, ou o *Dia*, com um dos braços atrás das costas, lembrando o aprisionamento do *Escravo Rebelde* (hoje no Louvre).

Na realidade, verificando o próprio *Laocoonte*, a estátua fora originalmente descoberta com um dos seus braços em falta, como pode ser observado nas gravuras de Giovanni António da Brescia e Marco Bente.

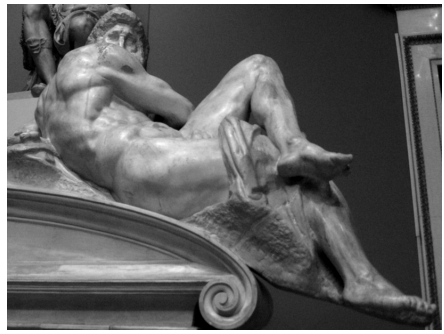
—

Moreover, considering the original projects for the tomb of Julius, presented by Charles de Tolnay, one can see that the statue of the Pope was originally projected to be secured by straps, reinforcing that all these elements derive from a common source.

Meanwhile, now back in Florence, Michelangelo designed and carved the tombs of the Medici Lorenzo (Duke of Urbino), and of Giuliano (Duke of Nemours), including complementary statues, as the *Aurora*, which as a strap compressing her chest, or the *Day*, which has one of its arms behind the back, resembling the imprisonment of the *Rebellious Slave* (today in the Louvre).

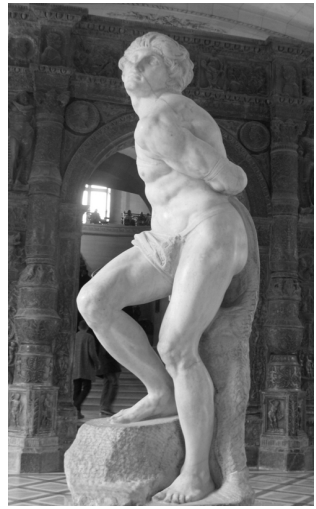
In fact, looking at the *Laocoön* itself, the statue was originally discovered with one of its arms missing, as can be seen in the engravings by Giovanni Antonio da Brescia and Marco Bente.

Giovanni Antonio da Brescia
Laocoonte
Laocoön



Michelangelo Buonarroti
O Dia
The Day

Michelangelo Buonarroti
Tecto da Capela Sistina
Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel
(det.)



Michelangelo Buonarroti
Escravo Rebelde
Rebellious slave

Nessa altura, a mesma figura dava a impressão de que o braço em falta estava atrás das costas, como na estátua do *Dia*, a qual por seu turno parece ser uma variante do *Laocoonte*, desenterrado e trazido à luz do dia.

Na verdade, cada uma das quatro estátuas alegóricas complementares parece ser uma combinação de outros trabalhos de Michelangelo, e mesmo da *Vénus e Marte de* Botticelli.

Acerca do *Dia* (Laocoonte/Marte), a sua cara deformada sugere um auto-retrato simbólico de Michelangelo, tal como a famosa pele esfolada no *Julgamento Final*, na Capela Sistina.

Efectivamente, o grande projecto seguinte encomendado a Michelangelo foi precisamente este *Julgamento Final*, e aqui o artista foi ainda mais explícito em expressar as influências do *Laocoonte e seus filhos*, nomeadamente em certas figuras atacadas por serpentes.

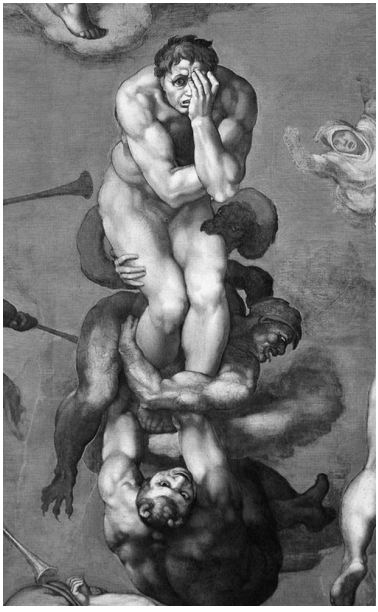
—

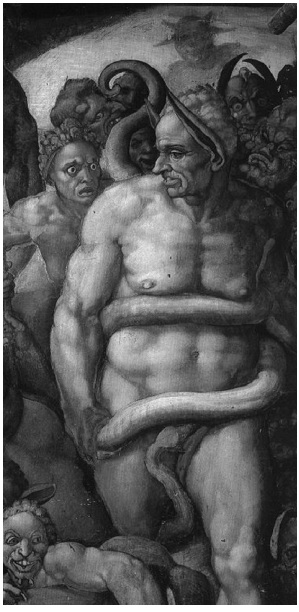
Then, the same figure gave the impression that the missing arm was behind its back, like the statue of the *Day*, which in turn seems to be a variant of the unearthed *Laocoön*, brought up to the light of day.

Actually, each of the allegorical complementary statues seems to be a combination of other Michelangelo's works, and even of Botticelli's *Venus and Mars*.

About the *Day* (Laocoön/Mars), its deformed face suggests that it is a symbolic self-portrait of Michelangelo, like the famous flayed skin in the *Last Judgement*, in the Sistine Chapel.

Indeed, the following great project commissioned to Michelangelo was precisely this *Last Judgement*, and here the artist was even more explicit in expressing the influences of the *Laocoön* and his sons, namely in certain figures attacked by serpents.





Michelangelo Buonarroti
Julgamento Final
Last Judgement
(dets.)

Também nas pinturas para a Cappella Paolina (Vaticano) são visíveis reminiscências adaptadas do *Laocoonte*, e alguns elementos aprisionantes podem ser encontrados nas últimas esculturas florentinas de Michelangelo, como o *Génio da Vitória* ou a *Pietà Palestrina*.

Em todo o caso, esta não é apenas uma questão formal, pois o artista revela que o *Laocoonte* lhe deu uma inspiração decisiva para ilustrar a ideia de aprisionamento, por vezes asfixiante, o que era importante para um Michelangelo obrigado a esconder várias crenças e orientações, sendo ao mesmo templo contratado para glorificar indivíduos e poderes que desprezava.

Para mais, o mesmo grupo do *Laocoonte* teve ainda outro papel importante nos trabalhos de Michelangelo, na medida em que reforçou a importância da arte clássica, especificamente como uma verdadeira declaração nacionalista.

—

Also in the paintings for the Cappella Paolina (Vatican) there are adapted reminiscences of the *Laocoön*, and the same constrictive elements can be found in Michelangelo's late Florentine sculptures, such as the *Genius of Victory* or the *Pietà Palestrina*.

However, this is not just a formal issue, since the artist reveals that the *Laocoön* gave him a decisive inspiration to illustrate the idea of "imprisonment", some times asphyxiating, which was important to Michelangelo, forced to hide several of his beliefs and orientations, being at the same time commissioned to glorify some individuals and powers he despised.

Furthermore, the same *Laocoön* group had also another important role in Michelangelo's works, because it reinforced the importance of Classical art, specifically as a truly nationalist statement.

Em conclusão, o *Laocoonte e seus filhos* foi crucial para Michelangelo Buonarroti, inspirando-o a desenvolver e personalizar os seus trabalhos e conceitos.

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In conclusion, the *Laocoön and his sons* was crucial for Michelangelo Buonarroti, inspiring him to develop and personalize his works and concepts.

© - Available for consultation

The L(eonardo) and the S(alai)

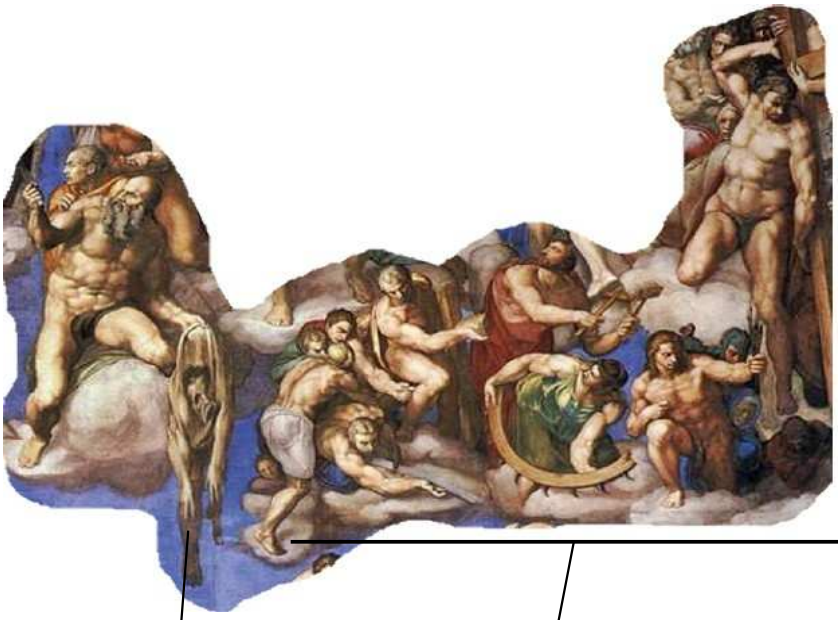
Paulo Martins Oliveira

The dual nature of Christ was often used as a metaphor for the human condition in general, corrupt by nature, but trying to overcome the sin and reach a higher state.

In this context, some painters encoded personal messages regarding themselves and their own sins, constituting veiled admissions and purges.

Thus, among other cases, Michelangelo punished himself for his collaboration with the Holy See; Jheronimus Bosch for his sales to the imperial Habsburgs; and Velázquez for his life in the Spanish court of Philip IV.

Example



Michelangelo "skinned" by Carafa, but also punishing himself for his collaboration with the Holy See

The construction of the immoral new St. Peter's Basilica (measuring, digging, painting, carving, laying...)

St. Sebastian is also a painter, and his arrows are brushes as well

As for Leonardo da Vinci, less attached to any particular power, he elected the relationship with Salai as a major symbol of his own carnal and fallible dimension.

The pertinent observation, by Silvano Vinceti, of an L and an S in the eyes of the *Mona Lisa* is actually part of this subject matter, as well as the link between that painting and the drawn portrait of Leonardo himself (Turin), as originally proposed by Lillian Schwartz.

Indeed, these elements should be taken into account when analysing the *Mona Lisa*, which is complex and presents other superimposed issues, some of them can be introduced in the context of this contribution.

• Currently exhibited at the Louvre, the *Mona Lisa* (better known as *Gioconda*, or *Joconde*)[1] is not the original portrait of Lisa Gherardini, but a typical symbolic construction, later painted by Leonardo.

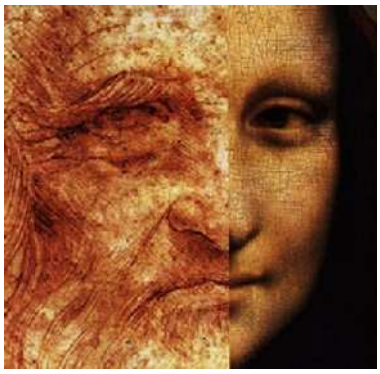
Mona Lisa
(Paris)

• This picture is the exact opposite of the self-portrait of Leonardo (Turin), which is also symbolic (a grotesque, instead of a realistic depiction).

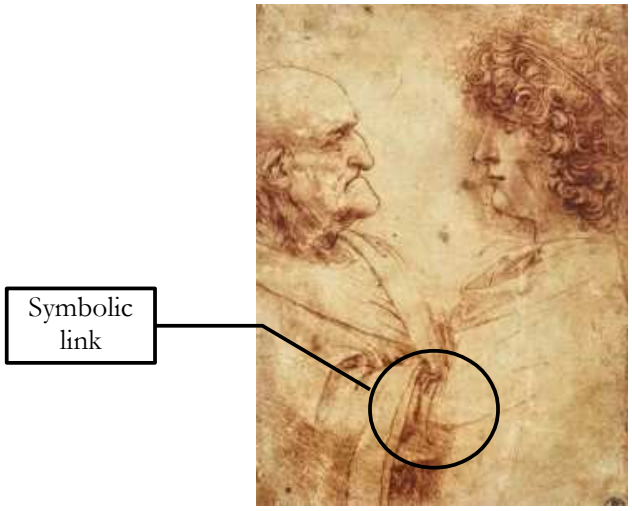
Symbolic self-portrait
(Turin)

1 In any case, this study uses the traditional and common designation *Mona Lisa*.

• By eliminating the eyebrows of the *Mona Lisa*, Leonardo reinforced the contrast with the drawing of Turin.

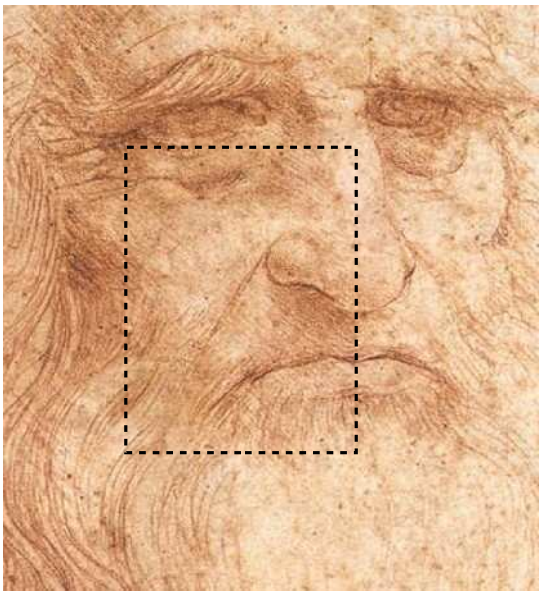


• Leonardo systematically explored strong contrasts.



Heads of an old man and a youth (also in red chalk)

• The aforementioned drawing in Turin was indeed made by Leonardo, who even included a second face, formed by the profound wrinkles below the eyes. The one on the left is clearly artificial, and allows to form a profile picture, using part of the nose and mouth (a mortuary mask).



• These autonomous and meaningful configurations were usually introduced by the best artists, and as will be shown later in this study, there are other elements that corroborate the attribution of the drawing to Leonardo.

• The *Mona Lisa* in the Louvre and the drawing in Turin are indeed related, but they function as deliberate contrasting images.

Example of a similar concept

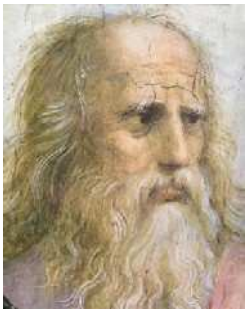
The new/beautiful

Caravaggio
Narcisus

The old/ugly

• In the drawing in Turin, the absence of the moustache may indicate a symbolic integration of Pope Julius II "il Terrible" (d.1513), reinforcing the negative meaning of the drawn picture.

Symbolic portrait of Leonardo, and realistic portrait of Julius II, both by Raphael.



• Expressing the duality of men, this kind of exercises was often developed by some painters, such as Jheronimus Bosch.

Anthonis van Aken

Jheronimus van Aken
"Bosch"

The carrying of the cross

The positive and the negative sides of Bosch himself

• Also Pieter Bruegel explored his own features in different contexts.

All these depictions represent the artist, although none of them is truly realistic.

• The drawing of Pieter Bruegel is as well a self-caricature, which also expresses his duality.

A concealed devil, symbolizing the negative side

• The rest of the drawing also represents the duality of the artist, dithering between his own creativity and the client's demands (and money). This tension is also symbolized by the brush, which handle resembles a piece of cutlery (the need for survival).

• The ingenuity of these exercises would be highly appreciated and emulated during the 16th century, and later Caravaggio will present various developments, constantly merging and adapting his own features.

David with the head of Goliath (Rome), both being symbolic portraits of Caravaggio.

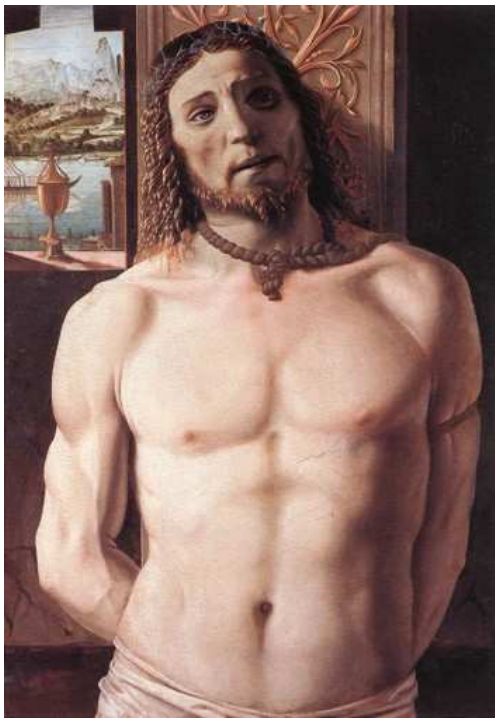
In the *Fortune Teller* (Paris), masculine and feminine, rejuvenated versions of the artist flirt each other.

• Being part of this dynamic context, the *Mona Lisa* presents superimposed issues, integrating various allusions.

• For example, pursuing specific objectives, the figure has the suggestion of wings, and was carefully placed to insinuate just one armband.

The Annunciation (det.), by Leonardo

Antique warrior, by Leonardo

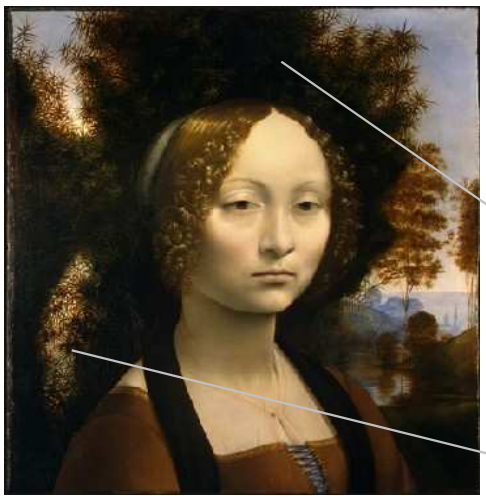


One of many related examples: *Christ at the column*, by Bramante

• In the same way, in the *Mona Lisa*, the arm of the chair was intentionally painted to suggest a book, adapting an earlier solution presented by Raphael.

• These adaptations were constant.

Example



Leonardo
Ginevra de' Benci

Botticelli
Primavera (det.)

• In one of its layers, the *Mona Lisa* symbolizes Leonardo himself, as mentioned above.

• Among other issues, this painting represents the greatest sin of Leonardo, specifically his relationship with Salai, which is expressed in the eyes of the Mona Lisa (L+S), but also in the curved road on the left, merging those two letters.

• The (unfinished) *Isleworth Mona Lisa* must also be considered in this context.

• Regardless of being an original, a copy, a preliminary work or just an experience, the *Isleworth Mona Lisa* has the key features of an intellectual exercise of Leonardo da Vinci.

• The *Isleworth Mona Lisa* is the symbolic equivalent of the *Mona Lisa* of the Louvre, but now primarily representing Salai.

• Indeed, besides the works executed by Leonardo, other paintings are only known through copies or adaptations, but nevertheless even these show the original logic, which revolves around the issue of duality and redemption, symbolized by Leonardo/Salai.

Examples of originals, copies and adaptations (full and details)

Symbolic depictions of Salai

Symbolic depictions of Leonardo

• Thus, the *Isleworth Mona Lisa* is related to artworks such as *St. John the Baptist* (Paris), which also symbolizes Salai (i.e. the sins of Leonardo).

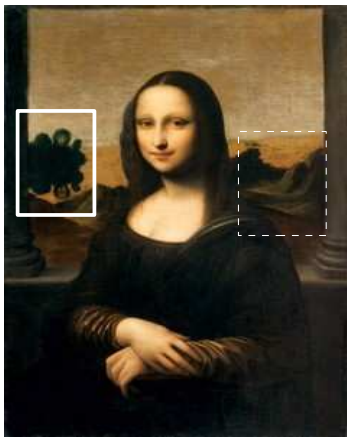
• Because John the Baptist washed Christ's earlier sins, the Baptist himself was often considered as a symbol of that obscure previous life[2].

Related example

In this painting by Dürer, the garment of "Christ" suggests the characteristic clothing of the Baptist (Mk.1:6), expressing the duality of the painter himself (symbolically self-portrayed).
These interchangeable roles were constant in the art of that period.

2 The intellectual humanists and and freethinkers also considered that Mary Magdalene and episodes such as the return of the prodigal son; the praying at Gethsemane; or the crucifixion with the two thieves, for example, symbolize the duality of a Christ closer to the common people, who in turn should understand their own duality and improve, to also reach a higher state.

• In the *Isleworth Mona Lisa*, the unfinished shape on the left represents trees reflected in a lake, introducing inthis case (of Salai) the sin of physical vanity. Also because of that, the central tree resembles the tail of a peacock.



• This kind of associations were common, and for instance, by contrast, in the *Mona Lisa* of the Louvre one of the mountains on the left (sinistra) is actually a grotesque head.

Mona Lisa (det.)

Pieter Bruegel
The carrying of the cross

Grotesques

• However, the greatest sin of Salai is the relationship with Leonardo, which is also symbolized by a curved road[3].

• As mentioned, that road also appears in the *Mona Lisa* of the Louvre, and as demonstrated elsewhere, it merges an L and an S[4].

•The use of adapted, deformed, reversed and blended letters was common at that time, as can be seen in the works of Jheronimus Bosch, whose exceptional complexity and variety constitutes a true catalogue of symbolic solutions, also useful for a better understanding of paintings of other paintings.

Brief examples from the works of Jheronimus Bosch:

The Garden of Earthly Delights (det.)
The key of the infernal abyss (Rev.20:1-2) with a reversed "N" (the corrupt Nassau). The *Garden of Earthly Delights* was commissioned by Engelbert II of Nassau, and this branch of the family was at that time supportive of the Habsburgs.

3 The *Isleworth Mona Lisa* could explain the two supposed contradictory versions regarding the immediate destiny of the *Joconde*. So, the finished main version was sold by the old Leonardo to the king of France (ending up in the Louvre), while Salai kept the *Isleworth Mona Lisa* (which followed a different path).

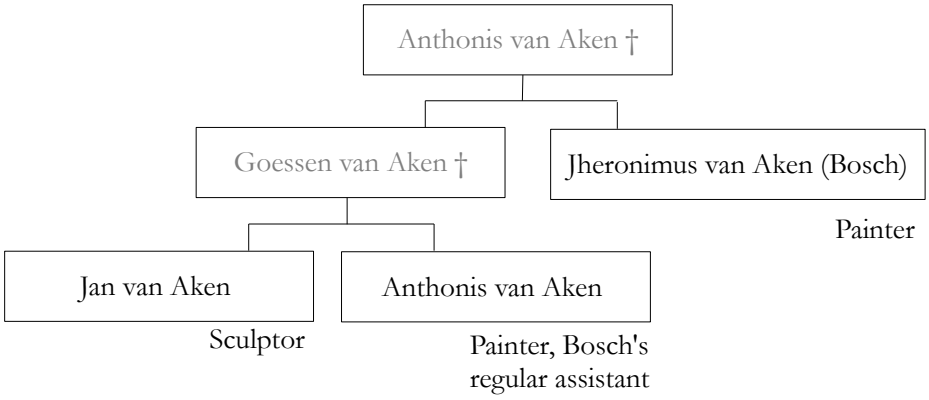
4 A text in English on that landscape can be found in *Separata 1*. The meaning(s) of the composite central figure will be presented in another text.

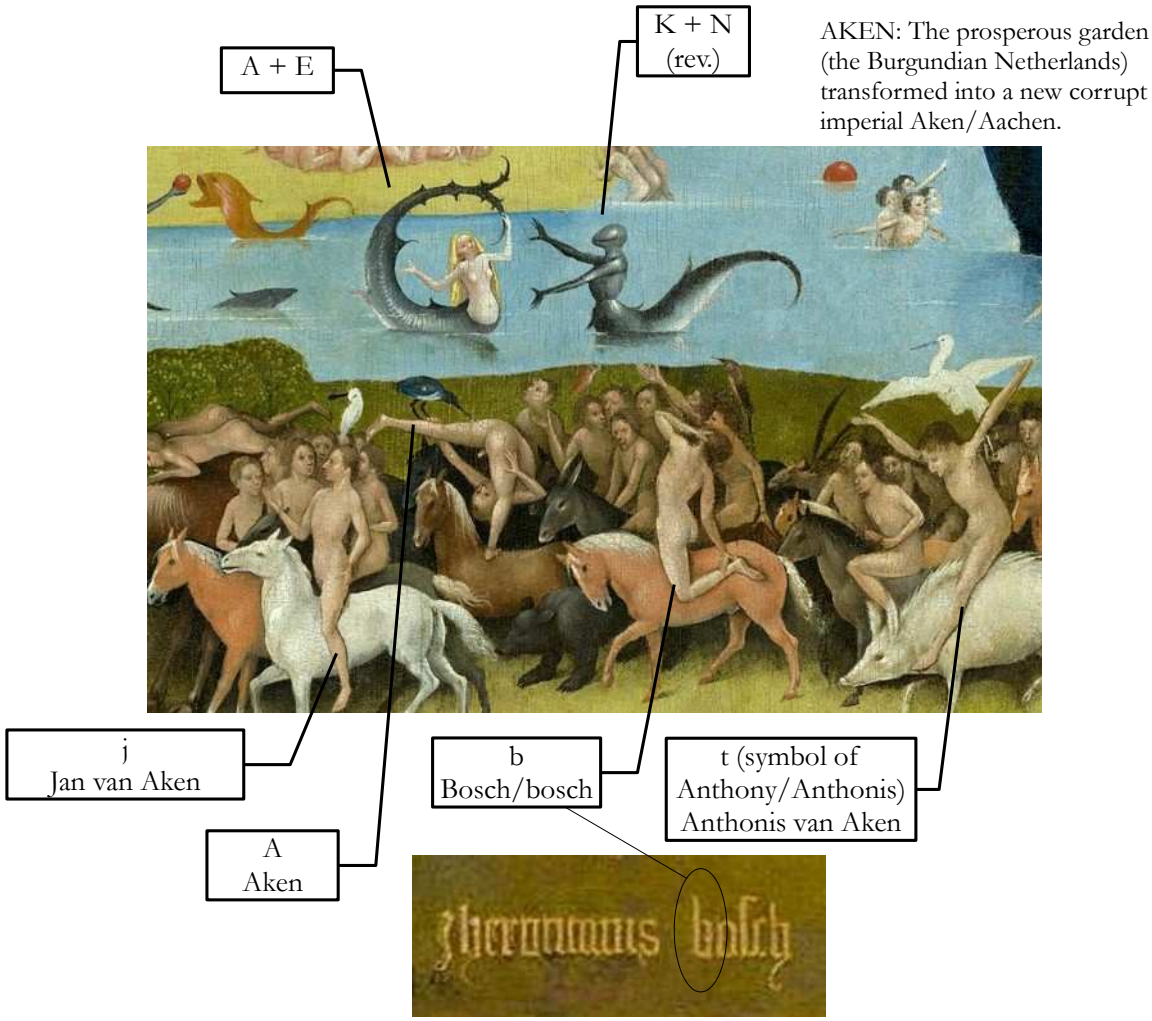
Just like the Dutch Nassau, also the Dutch van Aken had their origins in the Holy Empire (in the German city of Aachen), fact used by "Bosch" (Jheronimus van Aken) to encipher his own guilt. For this, Bosch often used the letter A, meaning Aken, which is the Dutch designation of Aachen, nothing less than the historical capital of the Holy Empire.

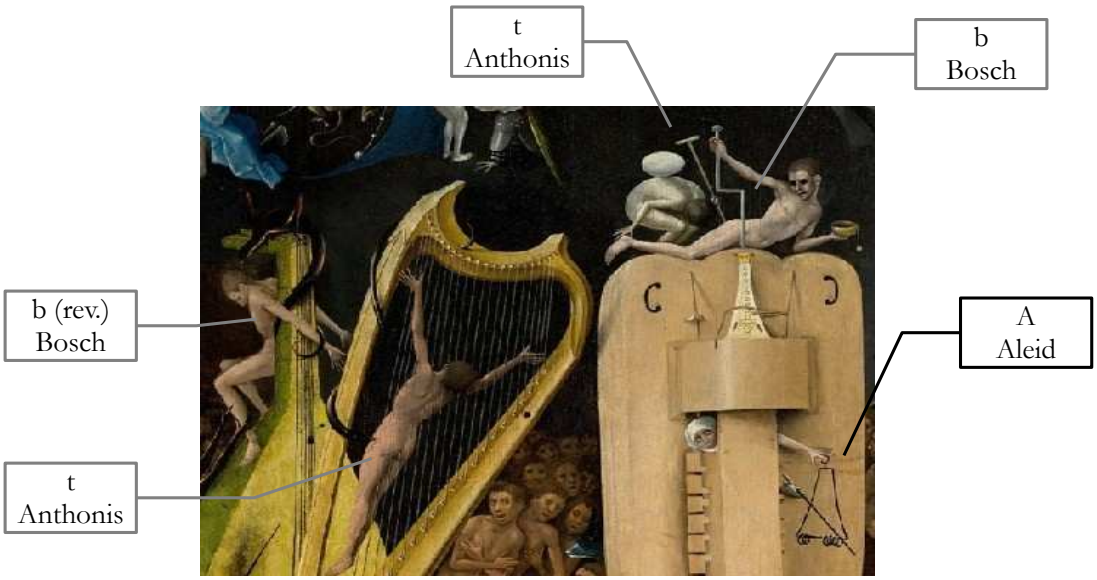
The Carrying of the Cross
Penitently helping "Christ" [Charles the Bold], Bosch also carries his own cross, which was deformed to represent an "A", completed with the body of the artist (who is being tempted again).

Bosch extended the need for redemption for all three artists of the Van Aken family, who were receiving commissions from the imperials and their deputies.

The Van Aken dinasty

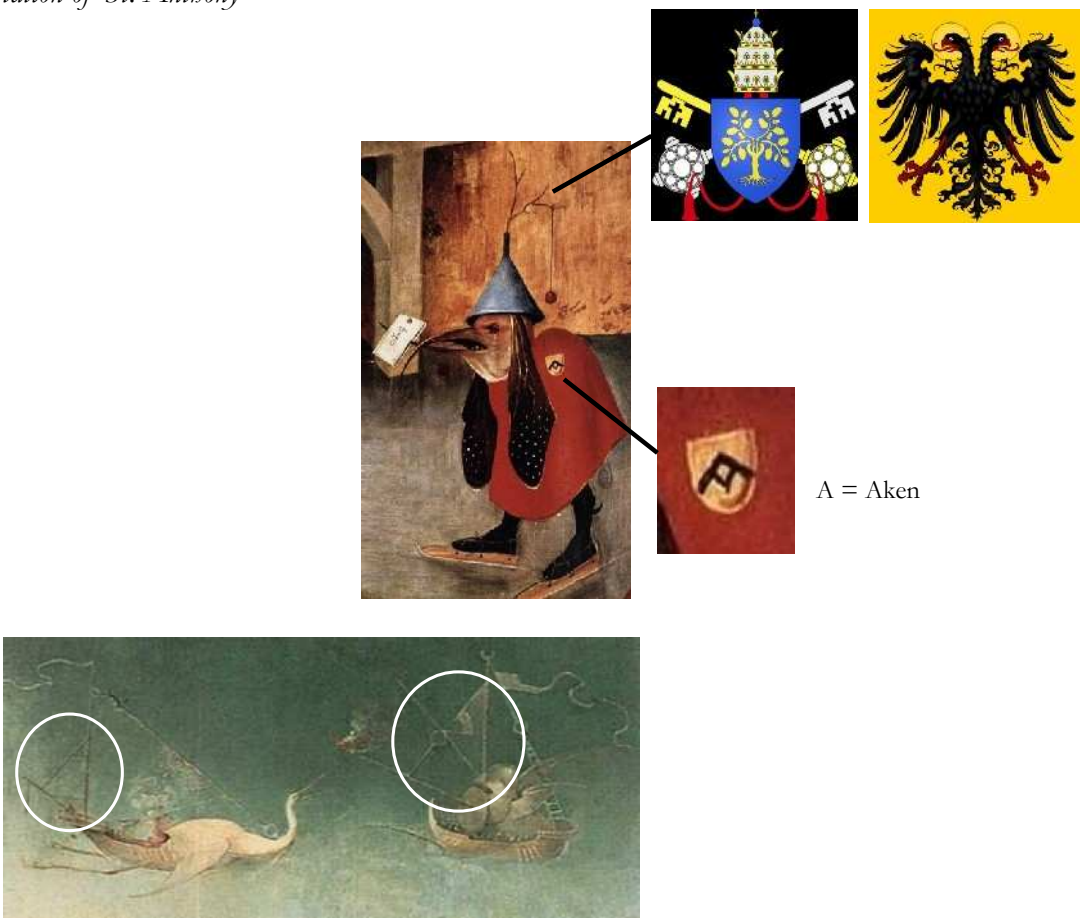






Aleid playing an "A", forcing his husband Bosch to accept commissions and work for the Habsburgs and the Nassau (several other elements confirm this interpretation).

The Temptation of St. Anthony



The struggle of conscience: the three Van Aken in the Dutch spoonbill, facing their own imperial patrons (Aken *versus* Aachen).
Using the same images, Bosch encoded layer after layer.

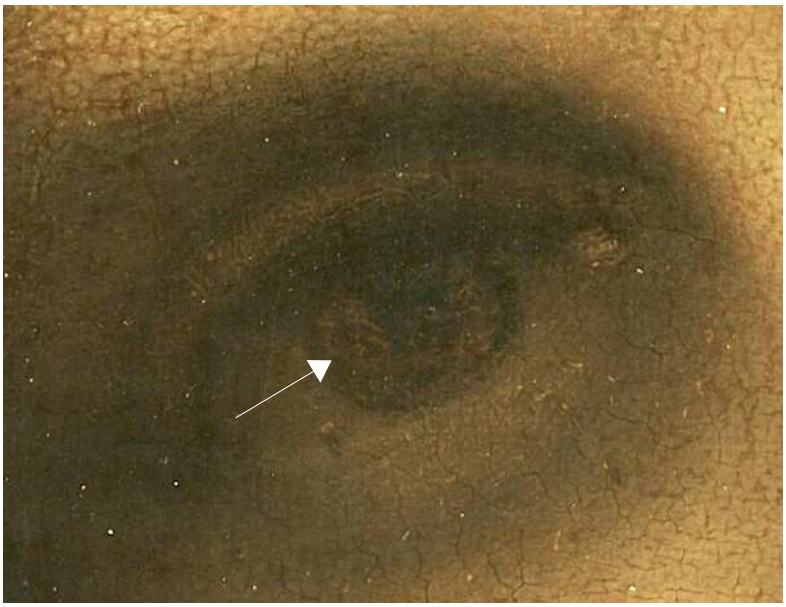
These brief examples show the variety of options regarding the use of letters in paintings, reinforcing that the curved road in the *Mona Lisa* merges an L and an S.

By its turn, this form is symmetrically related to the bridge on the right, whose three clear arches express a precise symbolism, concerning a progressive path[5].

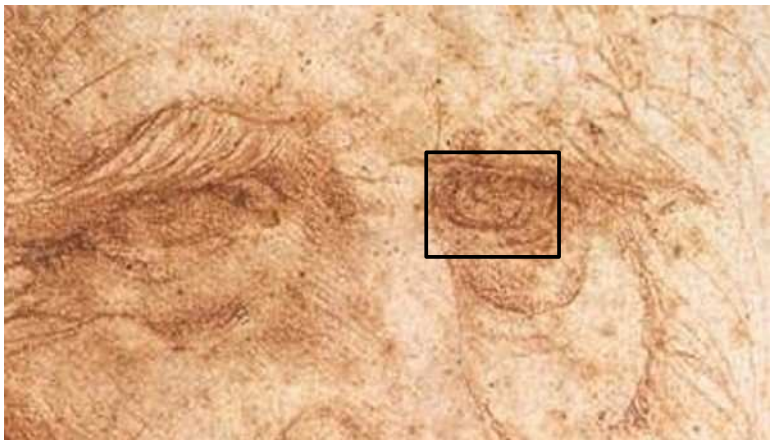
As mentioned in the beginning of this study, also the eyes of the *Mona Lisa* present those letters, as already noticed by Vinceti. The S is particularly clear, and its elaborate form expresses the intentionality of Leonardo.

5 There is a fourth arch, only partially visible, corresponding to a device often used to keep the messages less obvious. Among many other examples, Velázquez painted three long vertical marks behind *Pope Innocence X* (Rome). Two of them are deeper, symbolizing horns, whereas the other was strategically included to conceal the fact that Velázquez portrayed the Pope as Satan, ruling in the flames of Hell.

Furthermore, looking now at the *St. John the Baptist* of the Louvre, in one of its eyes there is a similar form, combining the L and the S.



Actually, the same happens with the grotesque representing Leonardo.



Again, a similar device is visible now in the second version of the *Virgin of the Rocks* (fin.1508, National Gallery). Here, the L/S appears at the centre of the Virgin's garment, expressing the same duality of sin and virtue[6].

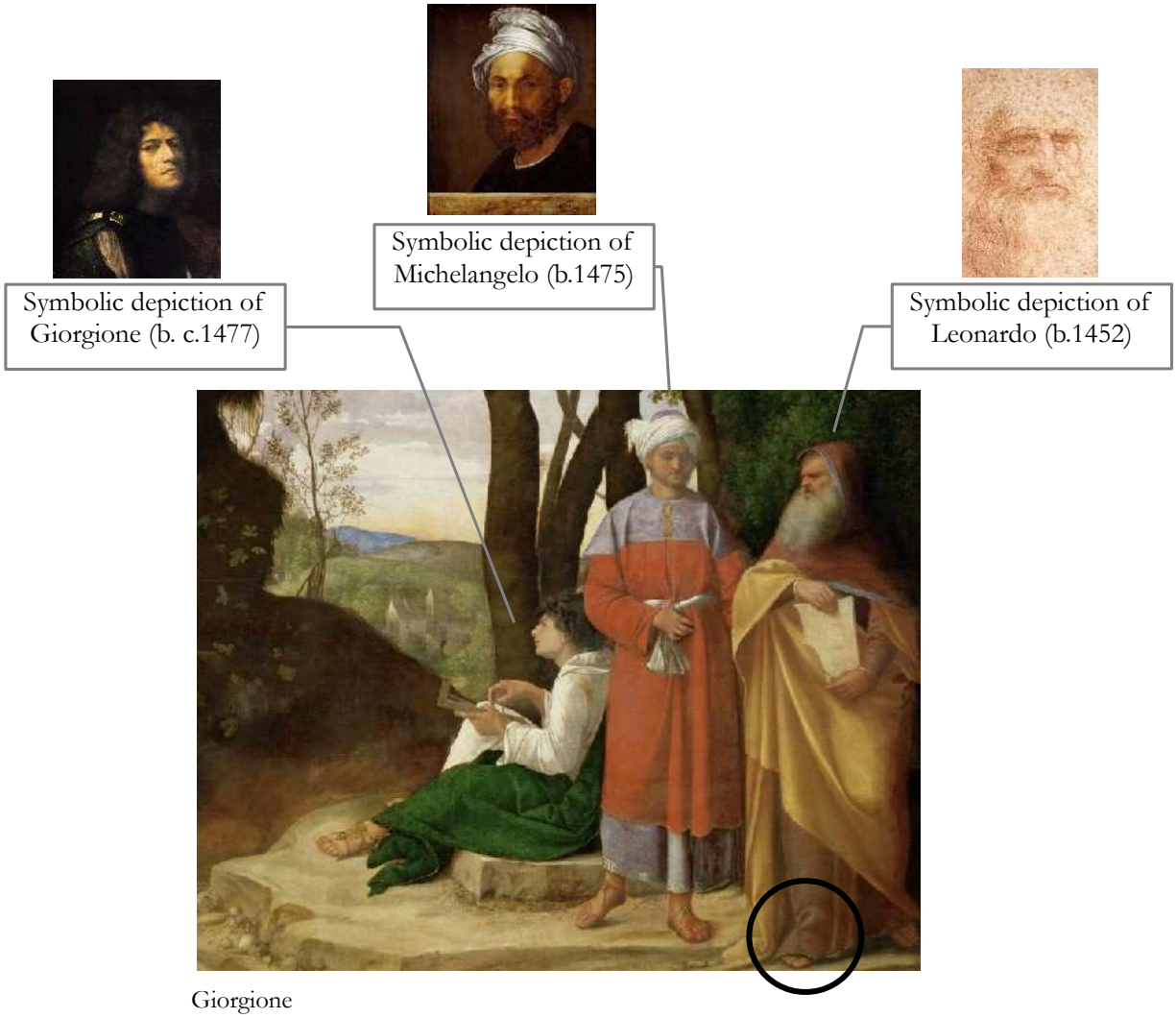
The desire of redemption is particularized in one of the Angel's eyes, in which appears the form L/S, immediately followed by just an L.

6 In another layer of meaning, this element also relates to the sarcastic perspective of Leonardo on the Immaculate Conception.

Logically, these elements are absent from the first version of the *Virgin of the Rocks* (fin.1486, Louvre)

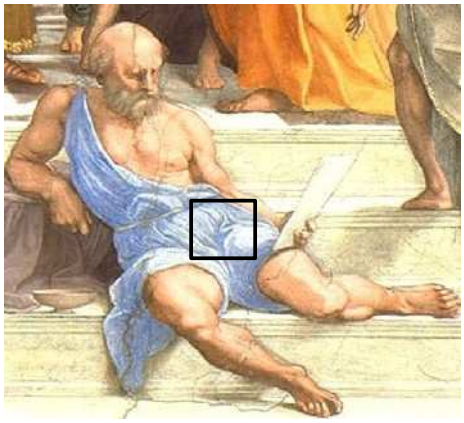
On the other hand, that symbol L/S was known by a few artists, who used variants to introduce Leonardo, directly or indirectly.

Examples


Symbolic depiction of Giorgione (b. c.1477)
Symbolic depiction of Michelangelo (b.1475)
Symbolic depiction of Leonardo (b.1452)

Giorgione
The Three Philosophers, det., 1510

In one of its layers, there are Michelangelo and Leonardo disputing, whereas Giorgione is fascinated by the oncoming death. The three are on the great head (intellect) of the recently deceased Botticelli.



In both cases (by Raphael and Michelangelo), the L/S concerns Leonardo, although the individuals themselves only indirectly relate to the artist, following precise narratives.

Symbolic portrait of Leonardo,
by Raphael

L + two horns, also an A (autonomus
Layer of meaning, also concerning Leonardo

Symbolic portrait of Leonardo,
by Michelangelo

The artists were in fact main actors in their works.

Example

Daniele da Volterra
Assumption of the Virgin
(Trinita dei Monti, Rome)

Michelangelo

Volterra

John / Botticelli
(+)

Peter / Leonardo
(-)

Plato / Leonardo
(+)

Aristotle / Botticelli
(-)

Earlier painting by Raphael, with symbolic depictions of Leonardo and Botticelli

In the Sistine Chapel, each Prophet and Sibyl represents an artist.

Examples

(-)

Leonardo

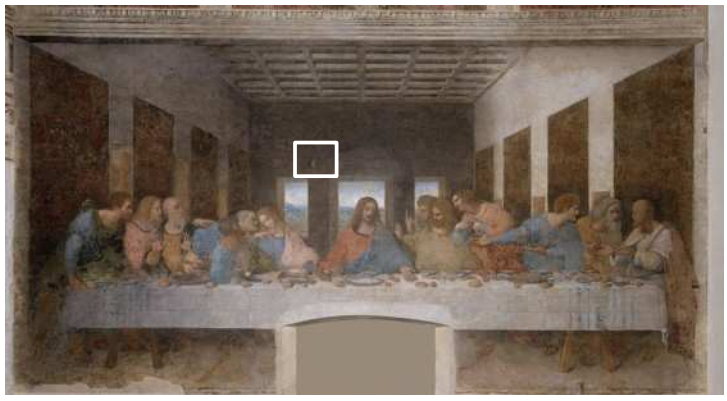
Bramante

Michelangelo

Botticelli

(+)

But looking again at the works of Leonardo, his personal desire for redemption is also visible in the *Last Supper* (Milan), specifically in a shape near the three openings behind the central figures, reinforcing the sequence created by the artist: from left to right; from human life to redemptive death; from shade to light.



That element has two sides, darkened on the left and lightened on the right, following the general principle of the painting.

But despite expressing the progressive direction, this form is still on the left half, that is to say, on the carnal side.

Thus, above it there is an intricate monogram, which blends the letters L and S, or in the other words, the human sins of the artist.

In conclusion, all these features underline that many artworks of that period are composite creations, merging different issues and layers, one of them reserved by the respective authors to encipher their own admissions.

[2012]

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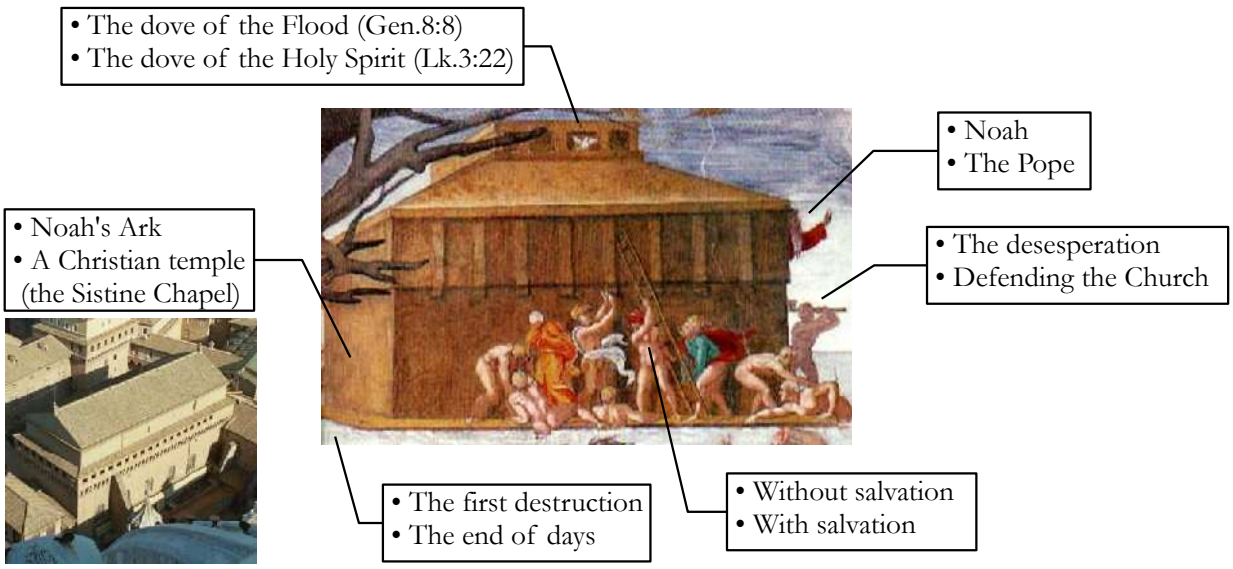
The Sistine Chapel and the two Testaments

Paulo Martins Oliveira

Michelangelo Buonarroti designed a complex scheme in the Sistine Chapel, through which the two Biblical Testaments were merged by means of compromise solutions, in order to present the Old foreseeing the New (expressing the logic of the *Bible*)[1].

By this way, Michelangelo gave Pope Julius II his requested ingenious work, capable of dazzling both the senses and the intellect of those who attended the celebrations held in the Sistine Chapel.

This can be seen, for instance, in the depiction of Noah's Ark, which actually refers to the Apocalypse and to the Bull *Unam Sanctam*, crucial to the doctrine and authority of the Holy See[2].


• The dove of the Flood (Gen.8:8)
• The dove of the Holy Spirit (Lk.3:22)
• Noah
• The Pope
• Noah's Ark
• A Christian temple (the Sistine Chapel)
• The desesperation
• Defending the Church
• The first destruction
• The end of days
• Without salvation
• With salvation

1 On this matter see, from the same author, the book *Leonardo x Michelangelo* (2012), pp.83-99, as well as the papers mentioned throughout this contribution.

2 The Bull *Unam Sanctam*, in brief: unquestionably led by the Pope, the Church of Christ (New Testament) is comparable to Noah's Ark (Old Testament). However the New Covenant is considered superior and broader, because its salvation is attainable by those who sincerely follow the Pope's guidance.

As also presented elsewhere[3], the large characters that surround the ceiling follow the same logic, as can be seen in the confronting extremities, between Jonah (connecting the ceiling to the eastern/sanctuary wall) and Zechariah (connecting the ceiling to the eastern wall/main entrance)[4].

Jonah

Zechariah

Jonah represents Christ, because they were both enclosed for three days (inside the whale and in the tomb, respectively).

Such symbolic association is specifically highlighted in the New Testament (Mt.12:40, Lk.11:30). Besides being the largest of those surrounding figures, Jonah is also flanked by scenes from the Old Testament which suggest the future death and power of the crucified Christ.

The Brazen Serpent

Jonah

The Punishment of Haman

As for Zechariah, he had foreseen the future glorious entry of a very humble "king" in Jerusalem, which was also recovered in the New Testament (Zech 9:9-10 ↔ Jn.12:13-16)[5]. Because of this, the ancient prophet was equated with John the Baptist, who announced the imminent appearance of the Messiah[6].

3 Specifically the paper titled "The Sistine Chapel and the New Jeremiah".

4 Also the famous figure of Adam implies a link between the two Testaments, as mentioned in *Leonardo x Michelangelo* (pp.97-109), and in the paper "The Sistine Chapel and the Holy Spirit" (reinforced by the comparative section of the paper "Reviewing Konrad Witz".

5 Also Matthew (21:2-5), Mark (11:1-10), and Luke (19:29-38) allude to what Zechariah had prophesied.

6 Furthermore, the Baptist's father was a Jewish priest named Zechariah (Lk.1:8).

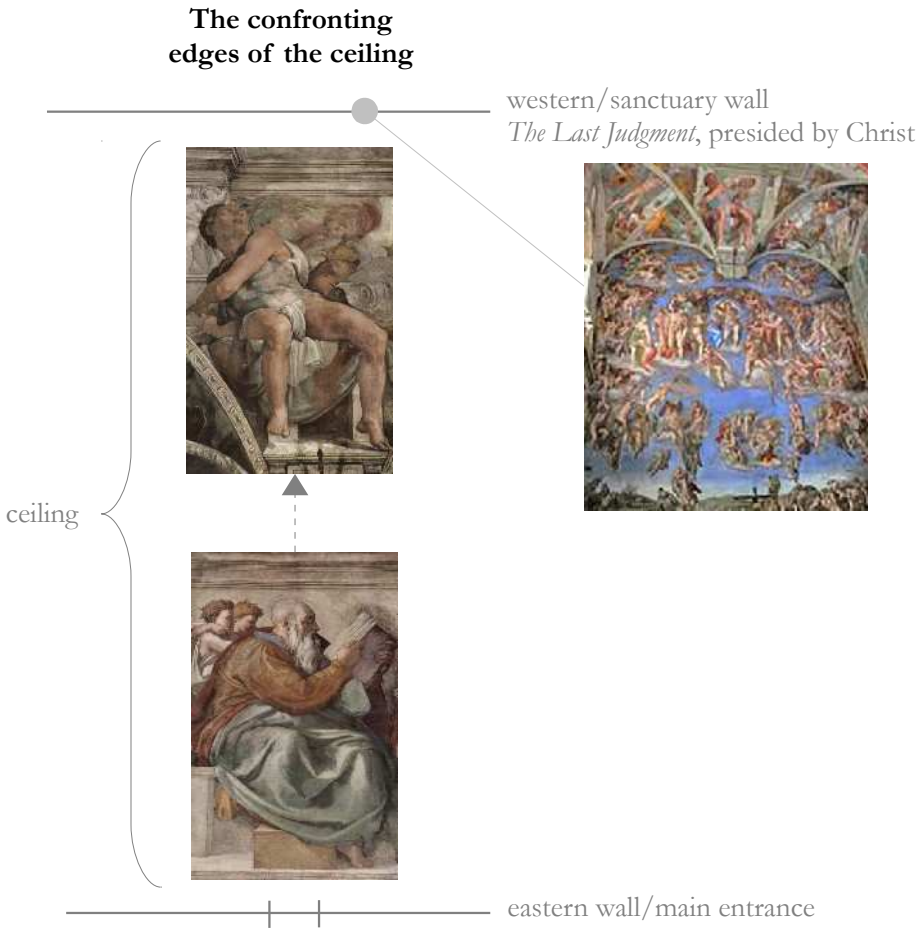
Zechariah is therefore flanked by images from the Old Testament suggesting the beheading of John the Baptist.

Judith and Holofernes

Zechariah

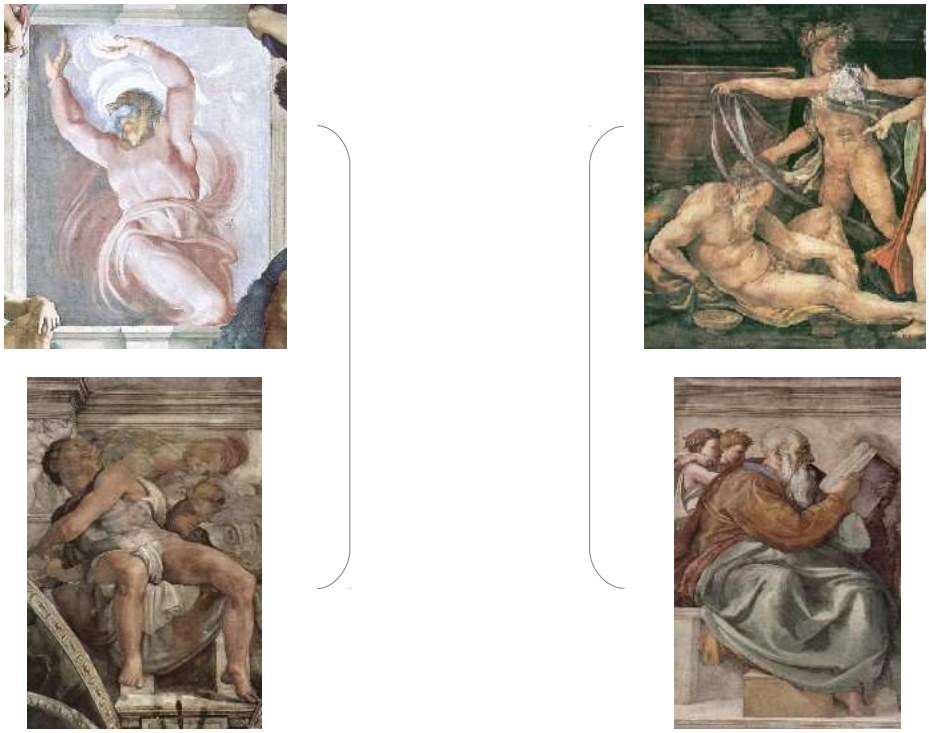
David beheading Goliath

Thus, in a general perspective, it is perfectly logical the connection between Zechariah/John the Baptist (eastern extremity, entrance, sunrise, alpha, anticipation) and Jonah/Christ (western extremity, altar, sunset, omega, consummation)[7].



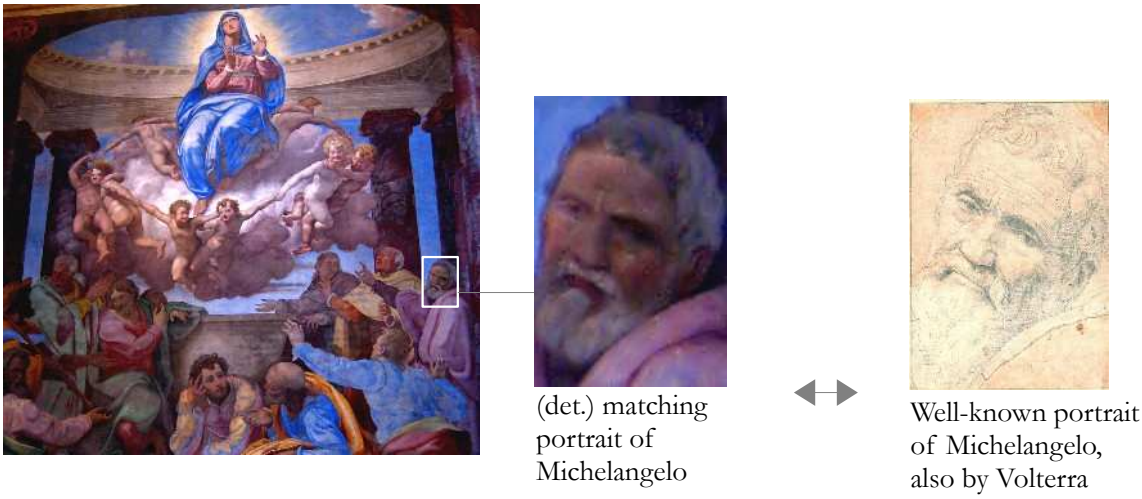
7 Also the other surrounding main figures were not randomly placed.

This concept is also reinforced by the link between these characters and the other images of the ceiling. Thus Jonah/Jesus connects with the almighty God, whereas Zechariah/John the Baptist connects with the very important but human Noah[8].



Moreover, besides other devices[9], Michelangelo also associated those characters with contemporary figures, as was common at the time[10].

One of many comparative evidences: *Assumption of the Virgin*, by Daniele da Volterra



(det.) matching portrait of Michelangelo

Well-known portrait of Michelangelo, also by Volterra

8 Indeed, Michelangelo gave systematic priority to the symbolic connections between his characters, which in turn fully explains certain supposed paradoxes of the Chapel.

9 The artist added other subtle schemes to express his own opinions, including criticisms of the papacy, as was common among certain freethinking painters of the Renaissance; see "The (diabolic) oak of the Rovere Popes".

10 For more on this issue see: "The L(eonardo) and the S(alai), "The Sistine Chapel and the new Jeremiah", and "Depicting Michelangelo", besides the book *Leonardo x Michelangelo* (pp.151-199).

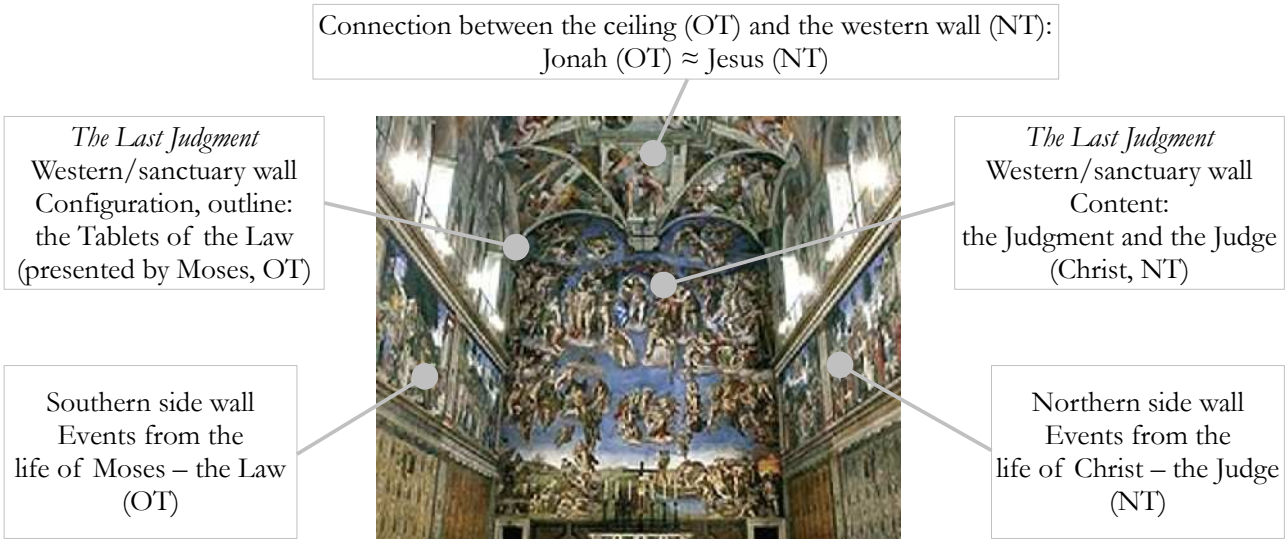
In fact, there are several complementary symbolic links between the Biblical era and the 16th century.

Example: ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, central medallion.

Superimposed meanings:

- King David being censured by Prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 12:7-10);
- The Holy Emperor being jubjected by the Pope (expressing the old rivalry between the Holy Empire and the Holy See);
- Michelangelo subversively equated both of them with the horse.

Focusing again on the aforementioned primary combination, such merging between the Old and the New Testament (OT/NT) is also visible in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* (1536-41, western/sanctuary wall of the Sistine Chapel)[11].



Therefore, as evidenced by this image, Michelangelo actually developed the original dialogue between the two Testaments (side walls), conceived back in 1481-82 by Botticelli and other artists[12].

In conclusion, as has been argued in several writings[13], the Sistine Chapel is thus a highly sophisticated "mechanism". In fact, the opposite would be a surprise.

2013

11 See the paper titled "The Sistine Chapel of Michelangelo: the Law and the Judge".

12 For instance, the episodes of Moses (especially those painted by Botticelli) already included subtle allusions to Jesus and other figures of the New Testament (see *Leonardo x Michelangelo*, chapter "Apples and acorns".

13 See all the studies mentioned in this contribution. A new one will be published, giving notice of another major aggregating scheme that Michelangelo had introduced in the Sistine Chapel.

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The Sistine Ceiling and the Holy Spirit

Paulo Martins Oliveira

As detailed in parallel studies, the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel combines different layers of meaning, actually following the request of Pope Julius II himself.

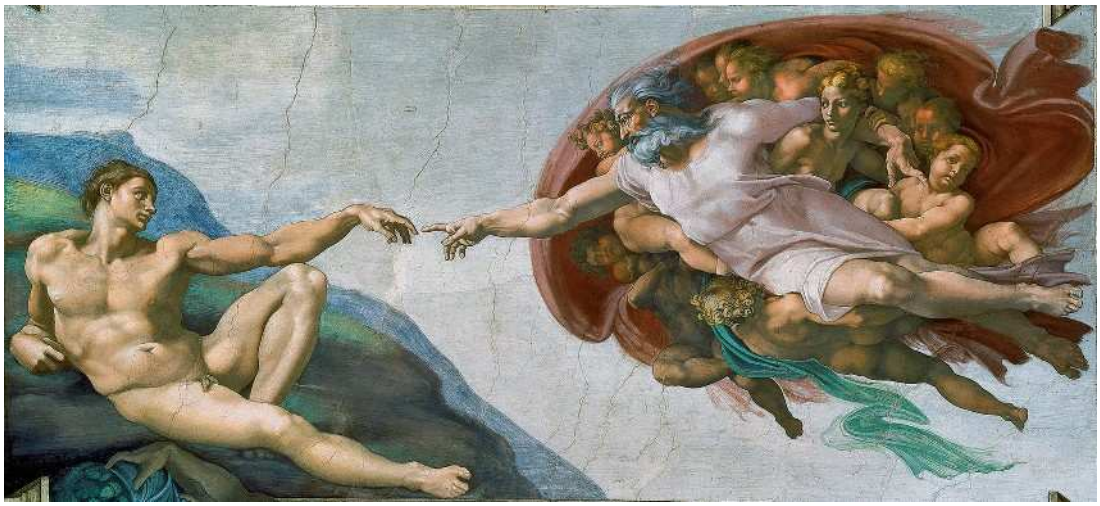
The artistic superimposition of various narratives was being explored by Michelangelo and some other painters, refining the previous developments of Sandro Botticelli, who in turn was based on earlier Flemish concepts.

By ordering such multi-layered model, Julius II wanted to ensure that the Sistine Chapel – the main symbol of the Rovere Popes – would also be an intellectual monument, capable of dazzling and challenging the sagacity of all senior clergymen.

In this context, Michelangelo designed sophisticated images that constantly merge the Old and the New Testament. But at the same time, he also incorporated surreptitious levels of meaning that express his freethought views, including subtle criticisms about the papacy and the institutional Church, as well as considerations on the dual nature of Christ, and even personal taunts directed at rival artists.

Thus, the schemes planned by Michelangelo for the Sistine Chapel can be seen as a complex and protean system.

A significant example of this symbolic engineering is the *Creation of Adam*, which is deliberately ambiguous and made of compromise solutions.



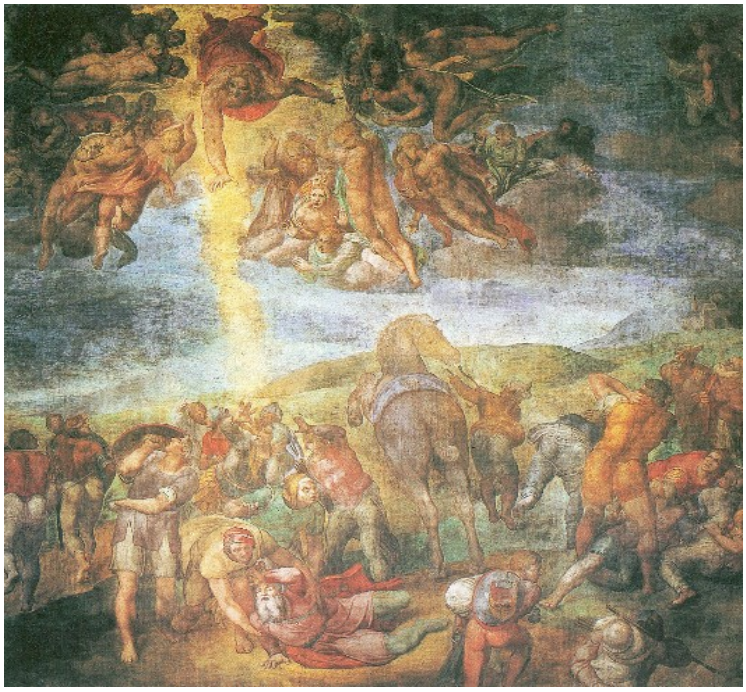
Michelangelo Buonarroti
The Creation of Adam

This image does not reflect accurately the Biblical writings regarding the creation of the first man (Old Testament), because the artist merged here another narrative (New Testament), in which there is the Father and the Son generating the Holy Spirit, which should descend and illuminate the clergymen[1]

This is why the imminent contact of fingers instinctively suggests a creation of energy.

(det.)

A similar beam of inspiring energy is actually materialized in Michelangelo's *The Conversion of Saul/Paul*, later painted in the Cappella Paolina, also in the Vatican.



Michelangelo Buonarroti
The Conversion of Saul/Paul
Cappella Paolina

1 In fact this was a major theological issue for the Roman Catholic Church, since the dissident Eastern Orthodox Church considered the Father as the only source of the Holy Spirit.

In this *Conversion*, Christ is depicted in a relatively conventional manner, whereas in the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel He was merged with Adam, also His ancestor (Lk. 3:23-38).

This partially explains the unusual representation of Christ in the *Last Judgment*, which is an even more layered character.

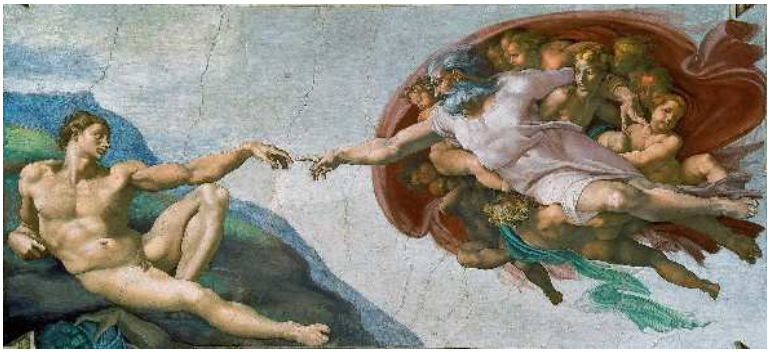
The Creation of Adam (det.)
Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel

The Last Judgment (det.)
Sanctuary wall of the Sistine Chapel

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last"
(Rev. 22:13)

On the other hand, as presented and contextualized in another place, these depictions subtly evoke the human dimension of the Messiah. This issue was particularly important to Michelangelo and to other humanist freethinkers, including Botticelli, whose multi-layered works became a decisive influence, both in form, and especially in content.

Sandro Botticelli
Venus and Mars
National Gallery, London



Michelangelo Buonarroti
The Creation of Adam
Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel

Indeed, these dynamic designs worked very accurately in overlapped layers, and such concept is actually decisive to understand the true extent of Michelangelo's works, as well as the paintings of other versatile artists.

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The Sistine Chapel and the new Jeremiah

Paulo Martins Oliveira

Do people make their own gods?
Yes, but they are not gods!

Jeremiah 16:20

When designing his complex and multilayered paintings[1], Michelangelo Buonarroti never confused art with religion itself. Actually, he retained a sarcastic view on his own work, using it to veil his admissions, as well as to address hidden criticisms to the Church of Rome.

Letter of Michelangelo (det.)
Self-caricature of the artist,
depicting the ceiling of the
Sistine Chapel

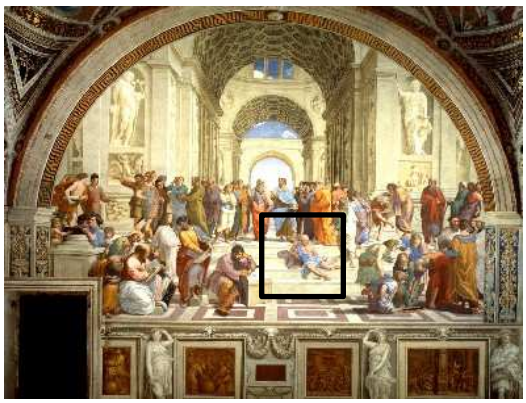
For this purpose he disguised devils throughout his paintings, as was relatively common among some artists[2].

Illustrative examples

Leonardo da Vinci
The Virgin of the Rocks

Michelangelo Buonarroti
Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel

Albrecht Dürer
Adoration of the Trinity



Raphael
The School of Athens

Titian
The Pesaro Altarpiece

In this context, all prophets and sibyls on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel actually symbolize artists who surreptitiously were advocating ideals of free-thought.
The group was however severely undermined by personal rivalries, originally polarized around Sandro Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci, as outlined elsewhere[3].

The confronting edges of the ceiling

Sanctuary wall
The Last Judgement, presided by Christ

Jonah (Botticelli)

Zechariah (Leonardo)

Main entrance

Jonah (Botticelli) is biblically valued as a symbolic precedent of Christ (Mt.12:40; Lk.11:30), because they were both enclosed for three days (respectively in the whale and in the tomb). On the ceiling, Jonah is flanked by two other images from the Old Testament, suggesting the future sacrifice and power of Christ on the cross.

The Brazen Serpent

Jonah
(Botticelli)

The Punishment of Haman

As for Zechariah (Leonardo), he is considered a precedent of St. John the Baptist, because Zechariah predicted the advent of a particularly humble king (Zec.9:9; Jn.12:15). On the ceiling, Zechariah is also flanked by two images from the Old Testament, in this case suggesting the beheading of John the Baptist (who is less important than Jonah/Christ, i.e. Botticelli).

Judith and Holofernes

Zechariah
(Leonardo)

David beheading Goliath

However, there were other ancient prophets of the Old Testament, besides Zechariah, who also foresaw the Messiah. Michelangelo selected Zechariah because this prophet received 30 pieces of silver (Zec.11:12). In this subtle way, Leonardo himself is equated to Judas (Mt.26:15), and even to a sinister vulture (Micah 1:16).

Michelangelo was a close supporter of Botticelli, standing next to him in the role of Jeremiah[4].

Jeremiah
(Michelangelo)

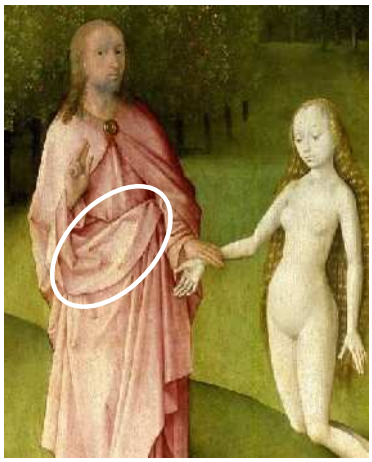
There were several reasons for which Michelangelo selected this prophet, including the systematic devaluation of Babylon and its idols.

"Babylon" had become a symbol of Rome and its pope, for whom Michelangelo and other artists were creating "idols" in luxurious temples.

Because of this, the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel hides various sarcastic figures, as briefly exemplified in the paper "The Devilish Chapel of Michelangelo".

Examples of devilish faces

Michelangelo Buonarroti
Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel



Jheronimus Bosch
The Garden of Earthly Delights

The following Biblical quotations, from the Book of Jeremiah, help to understand why this prophet was chosen to symbolize Michelangelo himself, who inconspicuously desacralized his own creations in order to mock and condemn the pretentiousness of the Holy See and its commissioned "idols".

Book of Jeremiah

7:30 They have set up their detestable idols in the house that bears my Name and defiled it.

8:19 Why have they aroused my [God's] anger with their worthless foreign idols?

10:5 Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm.

10:8-9 They are all senseless and foolish; they are taught by worthless wooden idols. Hammered silver is bought from Tarshish and gold from Uphaz. What the craftsman and goldsmith have made is then dressed in blue and purple – all made by skilled workers

10:14-15 Every man is stupid and without knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols, for his images are false, and there is no breath in them. They are worthless, a work of delusion; at the time of their punishment they shall perish.

14:22 Do any of the worthless idols of the nation bring rain?

16:18 I will repay them double for their wickedness and their sin, because they have defiled my land with lifeless forms of their vile images and have filled my inheritance with these detestable idols.

50:38 For it is a land of idols, idols that will go mad with terror.

51:17 All mankind is stupid, devoid of knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols; for his molten images are deceitful, and there is no breath in them. They are worthless, the objects of mockery; when their judgment comes, they will perish.

Michelangelo was a great expert on the *Bible*[5], finding in it all kinds of metaphors. So, the Book of Jeremiah was also important because it alludes to the sins and fair punishment of the beloved Jerusalem (Florence)[6], whose talented inhabitants were deported to Babylon (Rome), following the demands of the overbearing King Nebuchadnezzar (Pope Julius II)[7].

Jeremiah (Michelangelo) believed that this was the will of God, but that one day they will return free to Jerusalem, while Babylon is sacked and destroyed by a terrible people coming from the North (the Holy Empire)[8].

The return to "Jerusalem" was such a major issue for Michelangelo that his corpse would be secretly transported to Florence.

Michelangelo as Jeremiah, lamenting the fate of "Jerusalem",
as well as his own destiny (Jer.15:10).

Michelangelo Buonarroti
Moses - Tomb of Pope Julius II

Michelangelo as Moses, leader of the undercover "slaves" (unfinished statues)[9].
During this period, Julius II was equated to both the
Egyptian pharaoh and to the Babylonian king.

Comparative example
Rembrandt van Rijn
Jeremiah lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem
Rembrandt's father as Jeremiah,
lamenting the destruction of
the Netherlands by the Spaniards.

So, Michelangelo saw himself as a Florentine exiled, like his illustrious countryman Dante Alighieri (1265-1321).

Symbolic depictions of Michelangelo

by himself

by Raphael

by Titian

by Delacroix

The exiled Dante, by Domenico Peterlini

Tombs of Dante and Michelangelo, in Florence

Symbolic self-depictions of Michelangelo,
as a mournful exiled, and as an engaged freethinking leader.

In conclusion, the art of Michelangelo is a major expression of a multilayered concept that had been developed over the last decades, through which freethinking artists were competing in the development of the most ingenious solutions.

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NOTES

1 A brief example can be found in the article "Reviewing Konrad Witz – an ingenious artist of the 15th century"

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2 This issue is placed in context in the book *The Devils of Art*. Such devilish figures continued to be used throughout the centuries. Nevertheless, those of the humanist period (extended until the 17th century) are particularly complex, especially in terms of meaning.

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3 In fact, the later confrontation between Leonardo and Michelangelo followed an earlier dispute between Leonardo and Sandro Botticelli, who was Michelangelo's main reference (see the book *Leonardo x Michelangelo*).

---

4 Jeremiah/Michelangelo has his negative counterpart in the figure of Joel/Bramante, next to Zechariah/Leonardo.

Joel (Bramante)

Bramante

Biblically, Joel is less important than Jeremiah, and this implicit devaluation of Bramante (the Chief Architect of the Vatican) led him to grant Raphael a back-door access to the closed Sistine Chapel, when the paintings were still ongoing. In fact, Raphael was even more insulted on the ceiling, and responded immediately in the *School of Athens*.

Symbolic portrait of master Leonardo (+)

Symbolic portrait of the recently deceased Botticelli (-)

Symbolic portrait(s) of Michelangelo, as a despicable plagiarist (-)

Symbolic portrait of Bramante, as a true teacher (+)

5 Indeed, other details of the ceiling underline Michelangelo's exceptionally detailed knowledge of the *Bible*.

6 Italian artists often associated the Holy Land with the city of Florence, as well as with the regions of Tuscany, Umbria, Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy and Veneto.

7 For more on this issue, see the article "The (diabolic) oak of the Rovere Popes".

8 Rome would be indeed sacked by the imperial troops (1527), and this was somehow predictable considering the ancient rivalry between the Holy See and the Holy Empire, soon to be led by the exceptionally dominant Charles V, who since his childhood was compared to the Anti-Christ (see the infographic in the article "Porquê 'Jheronimus' Bosch?").

Related example
Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel
Central medallion of the ceiling

Layer 1: King David being reproved by Prophet Nathan.
Layer 2: The holy emperor submitting himself to the pope.
(these are both official layers; in a subversive third layer, both the pope and the emperor are symmetrically equated to the horse).

9 Like the painted "prophets" and "sibyls", the carved "slaves" symbolize the artists who were serving the Holy See, feeling constrained not only by the Inquisition, but especially by their own consciences.
Even in the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel Jeremiah/Michelangelo was already the actual leader of the group (being identified by an Aleph – see the article "Depicting Michelangelo").
As for the nationalism of the Florentine Michelangelo, it is expressed for instance in the sash of the Virgin (*Pietà*, St. Peter's basilica). This nationalist commitment (shared with Botticelli) extended the controversy with the more cosmopolitan Leonardo (who easily assimilated certain Flemish concepts, worked for foreign leaders, etc. – see *Leonardo x Michelangelo*). Furthermore, Florence should be the capital of a unified Italy, free from both the immorality of the Holy See, and the foreign interferences of the Holy Empire and France (on this matter see also the last chapter of *The Prince*, by Nicollò Machiavelli).

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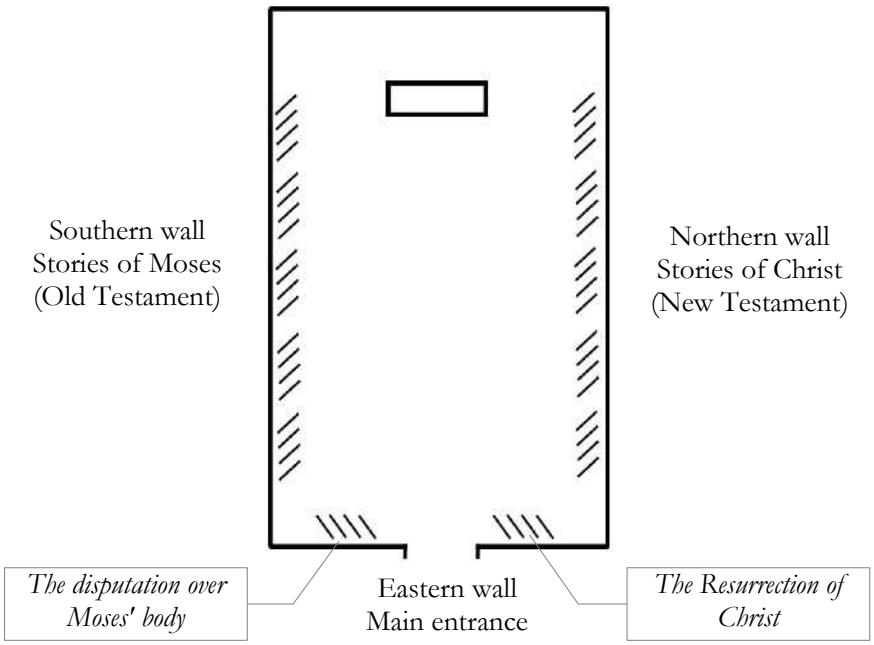
The Sistine Chapel of Michelangelo: the Law and the Judge

Paulo Martins Oliveira

In 1481-82 various artists painted the sidewalls of the Sistine Chapel, depicting different episodes from the lives of Moses (southern wall) and of Jesus (northern wall).

Complementing this first stage, the main door (eastern wall) was flanked by two culminating scenes: *The disputation over Moses' body*, and *The Resurrection of Christ*.[1]

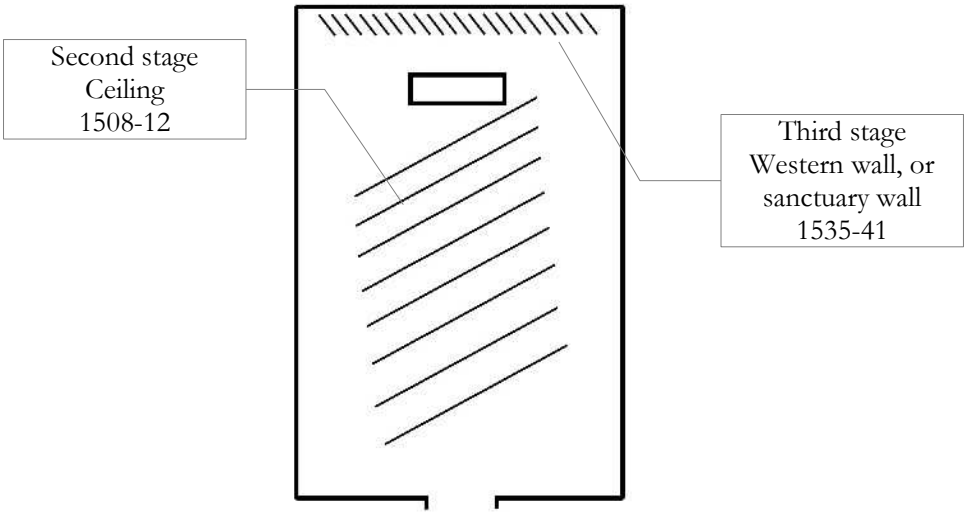
The first stage
1481-82, by various artists
(Botticelli, Perugino, Signorelli,
Ghirlandaio, Rosselli)



[1] These two final scenes of the first stage were originally painted by Luca Signorelli and Domenico Ghirlandaio. Almost a century later (1572-74), these frescoes were replaced by two others (by Matteo da Lecce and Hendrick van den Broeck) on the same subjects, thus keeping the original logic, in which is implied an hierarchy since the body of Moses was disputed (Jude 1:9), whereas Christ resurrected from the dead.

A few decades after this first stage, the rising artist Michelangelo Buonarroti was commissioned to paint the ceiling (1508-12), and later also the western wall, or sanctuary wall, behind the altar (1535-41).

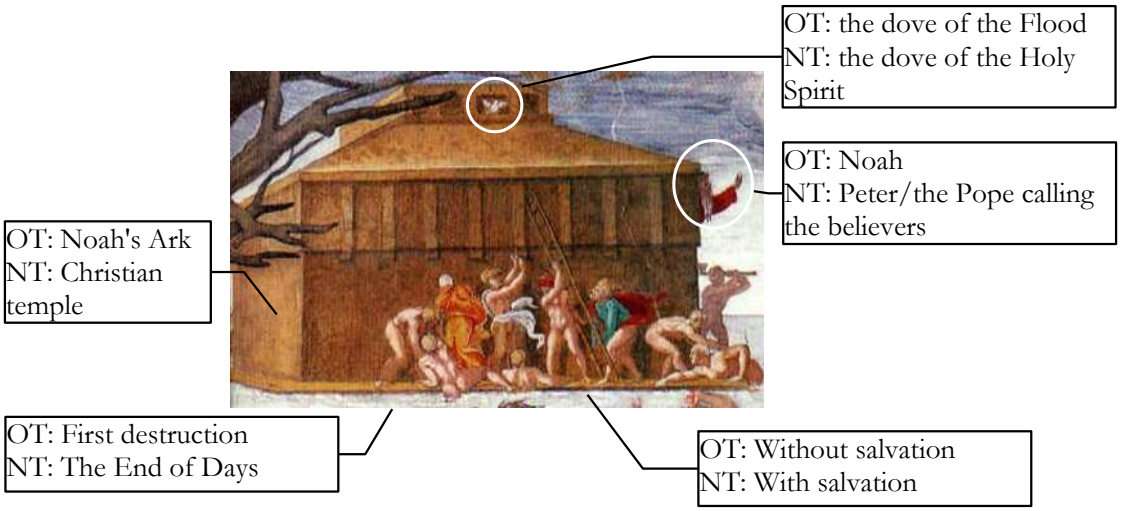
The second and third stages, by Michelangelo.



Rather than being limited or conditioned by the first stage, Michelangelo took that original association between Moses (the previous but incomplete Messiah) and Jesus (the full Messiah), and designed an elaborate system that highlights the relationship of the two Testaments, both in the ceiling and in the sanctuary wall.

In this context, the Old Testament is presented as a hazy preview of the New.[2]

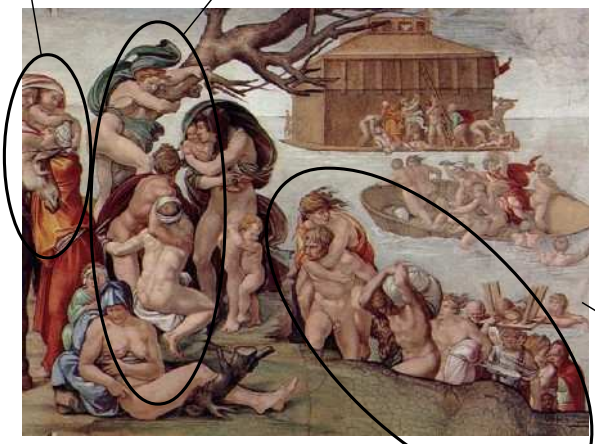
Examples of superimposed narratives: (8th section of the ceiling: The Great Flood)


OT: the dove of the Flood
NT: the dove of the Holy Spirit
OT: Noah
NT: Peter/the Pope calling the believers
OT: Noah's Ark
NT: Christian temple
OT: First destruction
NT: The End of Days
OT: Without salvation
NT: With salvation

[2] The Appendix of this paper contains a collection of biblical quotations about the connection between Moses and Jesus Christ, as well on the valuation of the New Covenant (of Jesus) over the Old Covenant (of Moses). Nevertheless, the Commandments given to Moses will remain as a key reference to evaluate the actions of each one, at the time of the Last Judgment, to be chaired by Christ.

The flight to Egypt (NT)

The crucifixion (the duty)

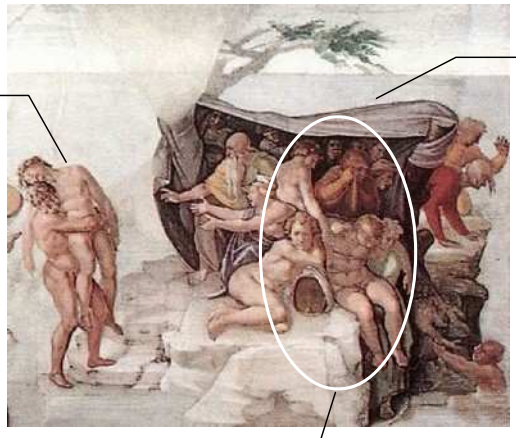


The Red Sea

The flight from Egypt (OT)

Sandro Botticelli
(southern wall)

The Descent from the cross



The tomb of Joseph of Arimathea

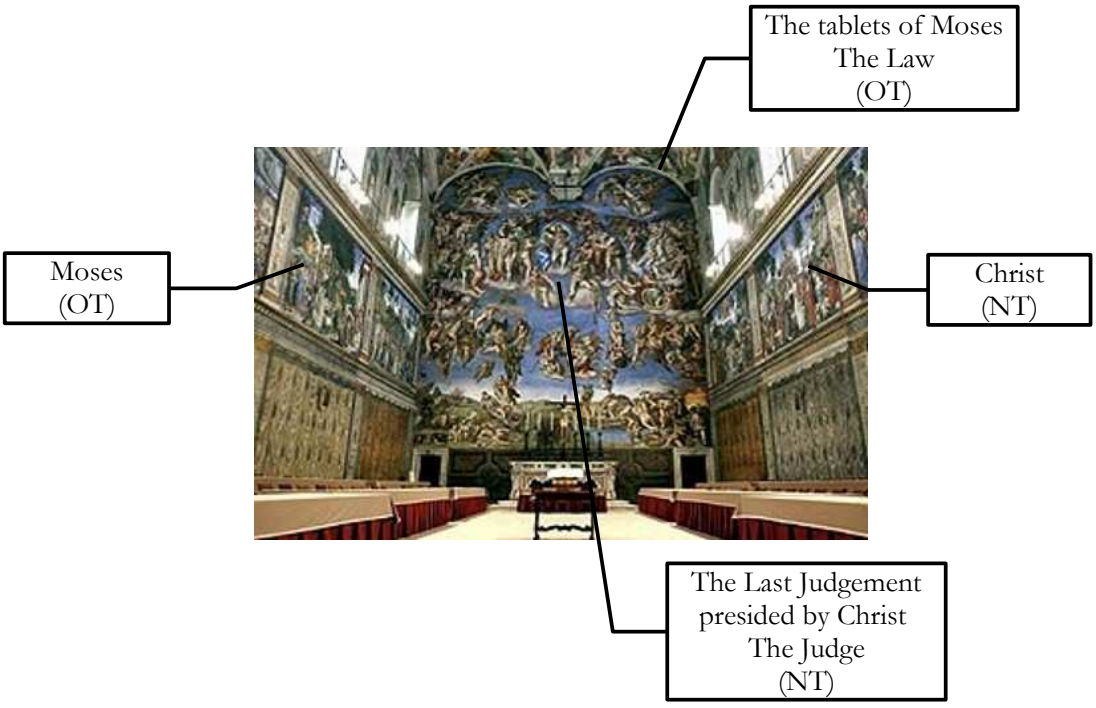
The Entombment

Michelangelo
The Entombment
(National Gallery)

This concept was reinforced on the sanctuary wall, were Michelangelo painted the *Last Judgment*. To this end he even eliminated scenes from the extremity of the ceiling, which he himself had painted earlier, during the second stage.

Originally part of the ceiling's narrative, these sections were completely redesigned and painted over, in order to integrate instead the *Last Judgment*.

Therefore, if on the one hand Michelangelo restricted certain subsidiary sequences of the ceiling, on the other hand he valued the general image of the *Last Judgment*, on the sanctuary wall, in which the outline of Moses' tablets (the Commandments) frame the ultimate judgment, presided by Christ[3].



[3] This final connection between Moses and Christ also synthesizes the logic of the other three walls. Besides these links, Michelangelo included other subsidiary, superimposed narratives, and in one of those the majestic figure of Christ in the *Last Judgement* is indeed also a symbolic portrait of Sandro Botticelli, as argued in *Leonardo x Michelangelo* and strengthened by further analysis.

In conclusion, the Sistine Chapel is a telling example of the ingenuity of Michelangelo, who was part of an exceptional ambience.

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Appendix

Ex 1:22
Then the Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl".

Mt 2:16
When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

Ex 34:30, 35
When Aaron and the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. (…) They saw that his face was radiant. Then, Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord.

Mt 17:1-2
After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes become as white as the light.

Ex 34:28
Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant – the Ten Commandments.

Ps 103:7
He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel.

Mt 5:17
Do not think that I [Christ] have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Jo 5:45-47
But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?

Jo 3:14-15
Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

Heb 11:24-26
By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

Rev 15:2
And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb [Christ].

Jo 1:17
For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Acts 3:22-23
For Moses said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people."

2 Cor 3:13-16
We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. 14 But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

Heb 3:1-6
Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.

Lk 16:16
The Law [of Moses] and the Prophets were proclaimed until John [the Baptist, announcer of Christ]. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing their way into it.

2 Cor 3:7-9
Now if the ministry that brought death [Moses], which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit [Christ] be even more glorious? If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!

Heb 8:7
For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.

Heb 10:1
The law [of Moses] is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves.

2 Cor 5:10
For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Jas 2:10
For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

Mt 19:16-17
Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"
"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."

Jo 5:22
Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

Jo 5:26-29
For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out - those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.

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The Passion of Caravaggio

Paulo Martins Oliveira

Introductory note

Following and extending a concept subtly developed by previous masters, Caravaggio merged different episodes into single synthesizing images[1].
This dynamic use of compromise solutions is the key to understanding Caravaggio's works, such as *The Flagellation of Christ* (Naples), which actually represents different steps of the Passion of Jesus.

In this context, for example the ambiguous position of his legs (arriving/leaving the column) is indicative of the protean design employed by the Italian artist.

1 A brief example of this concept can be found in the article "Reviewing Konrad Witz – an ingenious artist of the 15th century".

Superficial scene

Jesus was sent to be flogged.
Mt.27:26; Mk.15:15; Jn.19:1

Overlapped scene - A

The wroth high priest tore his own clothes, accusing Jesus of blasphemy.
Mt.26:65; Mk.14:63

det.

Comparative example

Giotto
Christ before the high priest (Caiaphas)

Overlapped scene - B

The soldiers mocked Jesus with a crown of thorns, and knelt before him sarcastically.
Mt.27:29; Mk.15:17-19

det.

Comparative example

Anthony van Dyck
Crowning with thorns (det.)

Overlapped scene - C

Jesus carried the cross with difficulty, being helped by Simon of Cyrene.
Mt.27:32; Mk.15:21; Lk.23:26

det.

Comparative example

Raphael
Christ falling on the way to Calvary (det.)

Overlapped scene - D

The soldiers placed Jesus on the cross.
Mk.15:24; Lk.23:33; Jn.19:18

det.

Comparative examples (also allegorical)

Dirck van Baburen
Prometheus being chained by Vulcan
(Prometheus represents Christ, associable to Hermes/Mercury, i.e. the Messenger)

Gerrit van Honthorst
Childhood of Christ
(The young Jesus glimpses his own redemptive destiny, i.e. to be crucified)

Overlapped scene - E

Jesus was crucified with two criminals.
Mt.27:38; Mk.15:27; Lk.23:33; Jn.19:18

det.

Comparative example (also allegorical)

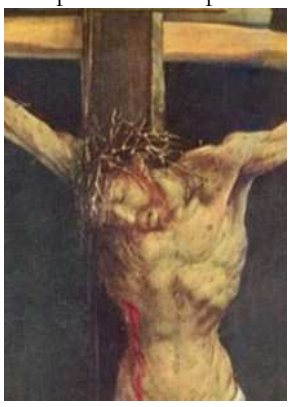
Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper (det.)
Christ (as James) crucified and flanked by the two "thieves"[2].

Overlapped scene - F

Darkness came over all the land. Christ bowed his head and died.
Mt.27:45; Mk.15:33; Lk.23:44; Jn.19:30

det.

Comparative example



Matthias Grünewald
The Crucifixion (det.)

2 See the article "Leonardo's *Last Supper* and the three layers".

Overlapped scene – G

The centurion recognized the divinity of Jesus.
Mk.15:39; Lk.23:47

det.

Comparative example

James Tissot
The confession of the centurion
(concerning the same episode)

Overlapped scene – H

Following a request from Joseph of Arimathea, Christ was taken down from the cross.
Mk.15:45-46; Lk.52-53; Jn.19:38-39

det.

Comparative example

Albrecht Dürer
The descent from the cross

Another example from Caravaggio, also summarizing the Passion

Caravaggio
The Crowning of Thorns

Layer 1: Christ being crowned with thorns.
Layer 2: The dead Jesus being lowered from the cross. On the left stands the respectful centurion.

Rubens
The descent from the cross

Lucas Cranach
Calvary
(Jesus and the centurion)

In a general perspective, Caravaggio designed characters with superimposed identities, and at the same time assigned a given identity to different individuals, in order to create dynamic narratives.

This elaborate symbolic engineering is systematically detectable in other works, such as *The Calling of St. Matthew*, fully decoded elsewhere[3].

A) The tax collector Matthew (Levi) is still absorbed in his work.

B) Matthew is "awakened" by the Good Word.

C) The converted Matthew receives instructions to spread the Good Word, and to convert others by himself.

In this layer, Caravaggio used three different characters to symbolize the progression of the same individual, and this work conceals several other ingenious sub-narratives[4].

Caravaggio extended and reinvented concepts of earlier masters, and left a deep influence on the next generation of artists, including Velázquez.

Diego Velázquez
Las Hilanderas

2013

3 Specifically in the article "O conceito dinâmico de Caravaggio".

4 For instance, the dialogue between characters B and C expresses a typical struggle of conscience, which accompanies all human beings, including the most holy ones. For more on this issue see the article "The Deceptive Angels" (concerning works of Titian and Caravaggio).

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The Leaves of Caravaggio

Paulo Martins Oliveira

Grace is even more beautiful than beauty
Jean de la Fontaine

Creativity is intelligence having fun
Albert Einstein

By mastering the use of ambiguities, various artists of the 15th, 16th, 17th centuries encoded different types of messages throughout multilayered paintings.

Even in the apparently simplest works they designed compromise solutions in order to merge surreptitious narratives and metaphors.

It is the case of Caravaggio's *Basket of fruit*, in which the two leaves pending on the right actually form the head and the torso of a poor man, who is looking up to the left [A].

A

The man is looking at a seagull that stole his fish [B].

B

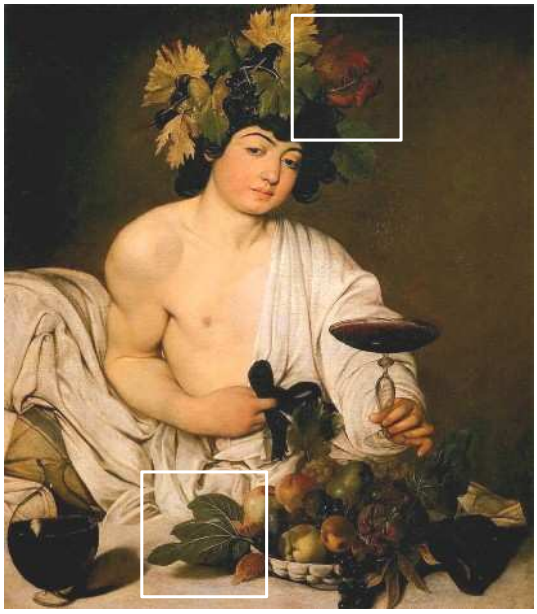
C

To his disappointment, the bird drops something other than the fish [C].

Thus, in his peculiar way, Caravaggio allegorizes about the continuous injustices and hardships of life, especially of those who are already unfortunate.

In fact, that artist systematically introduced numerous unsuspected sub-narratives in his paintings. For instance, again using leaves, Caravaggio elaborated a curious combination in his *Bacchus*.

1



2

1: On the lower left there is a lush leaf suggesting a humanized face, looking eagerly at the bottle of wine.
2: The result is presented on the upper right, where the leaf is red and completely drunk.

In summary, the shown examples demonstrate the wit and versatility of this kind of challenging art, of which Caravaggio was one of the greatest and most subtle interpreters.

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A Bênção de Rafael

Paulo Martins Oliveira

"Que proclama tudo isto, senão que todos os mortais são loucos, até mesmo os pios? O próprio Cristo, para socorrer a loucura dos mortais, embora ele fosse a sapiência do Pai, consentiu em ser feito louco, quando revestiu a natureza humana e se mostrou com figura humana, ou quando se fez pecador para redimir os pecados".

Erasmo de Roterdão: *O Elogio da Loucura*

Pintada por Rafael, *A Bênção de Cristo* é um dos bons exemplos do subtil registo auto-biográfico que se esconde nas mais diversas obras do Renascimento Humanista, cujos princípios e conceitos fundamentais ainda continuariam a ser explorados por artistas de períodos posteriores.

Neste contexto, tomando proveito das potencialidades técnicas da pintura a óleo, Rafael transfigurou o seu rosto no de Cristo.

Rafael
A Bênção de Cristo

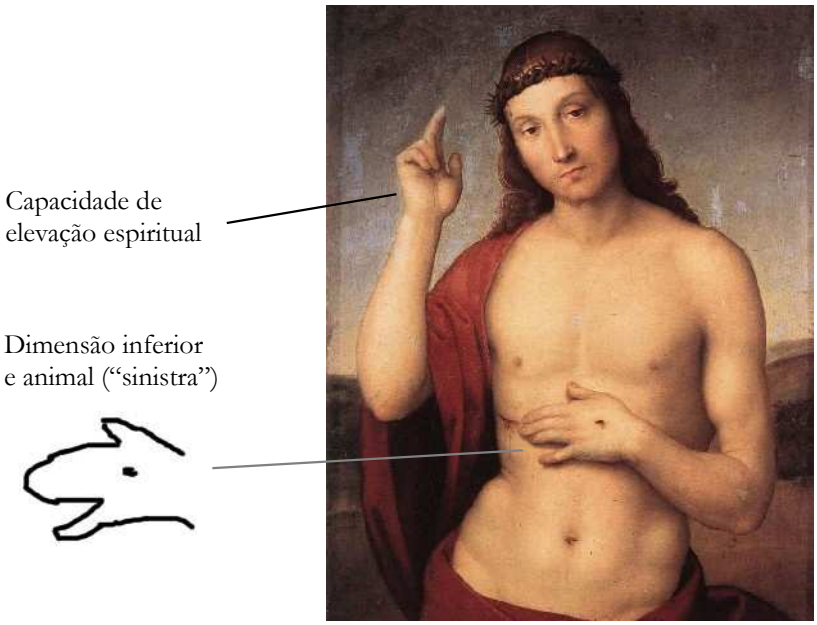
Rafael
Escola de Atenas
(auto-retrato)

Na verdade, este exercício começa por destacar sub-repticiamente a dimensão também humana do Messias, que o Vaticano pretendia mitigar, mas que os intelectuais e criadores humanistas sempre se esforçaram por ir sublinhando, recorrendo para tal a numerosos artifícios e engenhos alegóricos.

Jesus Cristo tornou-se assim no símbolo maior de uma dualidade que faz do Homem uma criatura única no Mundo, tal como o definiu Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, cujo *Discurso* foi considerado o manifesto do próprio Renascimento, e em cujas páginas inclusivamente se podem encontrar as soluções para certos enigmas artísticos.

Em todo o caso, e focando a linha condutora do pensamento de Pico della Mirandola, emerge precisamente a ideia de como o Homem, embora padecendo dos "tumultos do animal multiforme", possui todavia o livre-arbítrio para se aproximar de Deus.

Esta perspectiva está bem presente na *Bênção de Cristo*, por Rafael.



Neste contexto, ainda mais do que simbolizar a simples dualidade entre carne e espírito, Jesus Cristo é tido como o principal representante da ideia de evolução para o divino.

Assim, os humanistas consideravam que se encontrava aqui a explicação para o misterioso vazio bíblico quanto à vida de Jesus entre os 12 e os 30 anos, momento em que ressurge a ser baptizado no rio Jordão, ou seja, assumindo verdadeiramente a missão que o Pai Lhe destinara, e que culminaria na morte na cruz.

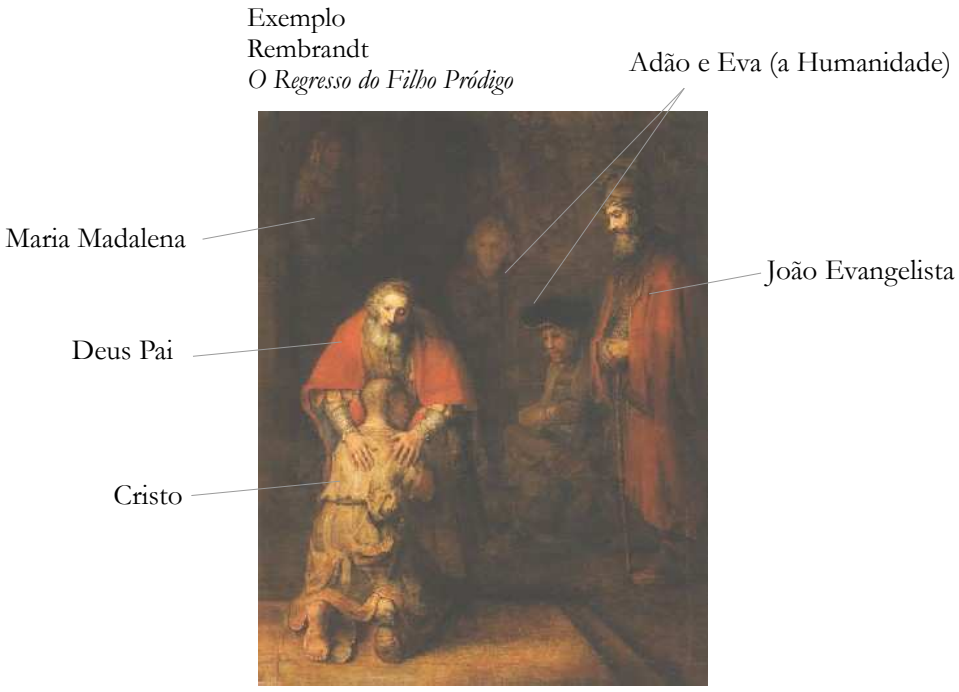
Uma das figuras centrais desse "evangelho" omisso é Maria Madalena, que se considerava poder ter sido companheira carnal de Cristo, naqueles anos em que o Messias andou afastado da incumbência dada pelo Pai.

Exemplo
Gerrit van Honthorst
O Filho Pródigo

O "Filho Pródigo" representa Cristo com Maria Madalena e outros convidados. Nesta versão invertida da Última Ceia, Ele está acompanhado por apenas seis pessoas, sendo o cálice de vinho branco (em vez de vermelho-sangue) enquadrado pela "infernal" chama de uma vela.

Como referido, por volta dos 30 anos Cristo viria a reencontrar-se com a missão do Pai, sob a égide de João Baptista, que reencaminhou o Messias através do baptismo no Jordão.

Exemplo
Rembrandt
O Regresso do Filho Pródigo



Para trás ficou a vida conjugal com Maria Madalena, a qual acabaria por se redimir e compreender a trágica e superior missão reservada a Cristo.

Também essa separação inicial foi por diversas vezes codificada na Arte, frequentemente sob o título de *Noli me tangere*.

Exemplo
Correggio
Noli me tangere

Numa perspectiva oficial, esta representação ilustra Maria Madalena deparando-se com o ressuscitado Cristo, que em breve irá subir aos Céus. Todavia, Madalena expressa um inusitado desespero, traduzindo sub-repticiamente a separação anterior, quando Jesus desfez a vida conjugal para subir e morrer na cruz.

Quanto a essa anterior união carnal, Michelangelo fora ousado na metáfora, como era aliás seu timbre.

Michelangelo (cópia)
Leda e o Cisne

O cisne é um sinónimo de Cristo, devido ao seu belo canto de morte (o "canto do cisne"). Além disso, a forma fálica do pescoço aludia também à dimensão masculina e sexual, como foi aproveitado por Tintoretto, que igualmente codificou mensagens cristãs por associação a temas mitológicos.

Tintoretto
Leda e o Cisne

A este propósito, considerava-se tradicionalmente que a bíblica e enigmática Maria (irmã de Marta) era de facto Maria Madalena, tendo os artistas desenvolvido um esquema segundo o qual Marta (equiparável a João Baptista) representa o apelo ao dever, enquanto Maria Madalena (equiparável ao falível Cristo) reporta a tentação a que sucumbira Jesus num primeiro momento.

No quadro de Tintoretto, Jesus Cristo é o luxurioso cisne junto de Maria Madalena, mas igualmente o pato engaiolado e destinado à morte, no lado de Marta (na perspectiva dos personagens, o pato encontra-se efectivamente à direita da composição, culminando a sequência).

Mas tornando a questão ainda mais controversa, os pintores humanistas não excluíam uma possível descendência daquela relação entre Cristo e Madalena, o que na verdade acentuava ainda mais o sacrifício do Messias e o respectivo espírito de missão.

Exemplo
Jheronimus Bosch
A Paixão de Cristo (det.)

De facto, Bosch tratou este assunto repetidas vezes e de modo versátil, tal como Leonardo da Vinci.

Leonardo (cópia)
Leda e o Cisne

Apesar dessa descendência ter nascido do pecado e desvio de Cristo, Rembrandt alegorizaria uma redentora bênção dada por Deus Pai à prole de Jesus e Madalena.

Rembrandt
Jacob abençoando os filhos de José

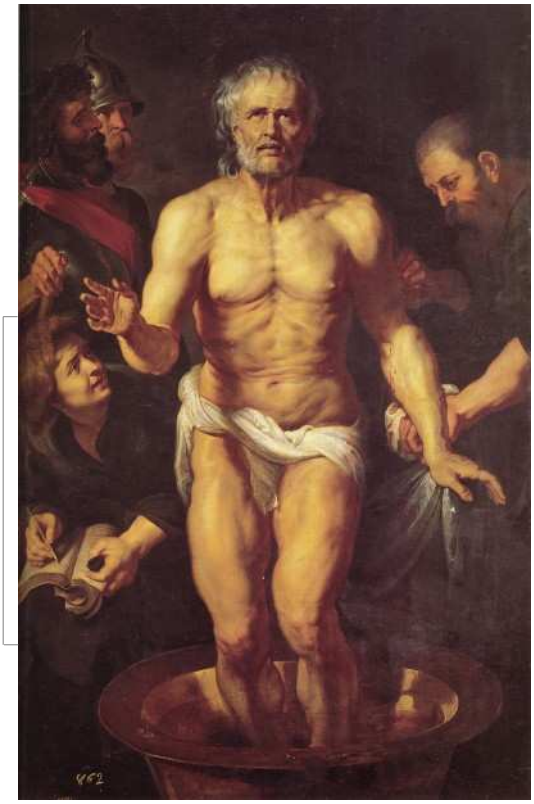
Entretanto, perseguida por "Pedro" e seus vigários, essa descendência constituía para os humanistas uma messiânica esperança, nomeadamente a de que existiria alguém com o sangue de Cristo, tendo portanto mais autoridade e legitimidade que os corruptos papas e sacro-imperadores.

Esta questão foi abordada por vários artistas livres-pensadores, incluindo Caravaggio, embora tivesse sido Michelangelo quem, mais uma vez, projectou a mais provocadora alusão a essa linhagem, em plena Capela Sistina.

Efectivamente, para se interpretar a arte desse período é necessário atender à sua estrutura predominantemente metafórica e versátil.

Representações de João Evangelista

Rubens
A morte de Séneca

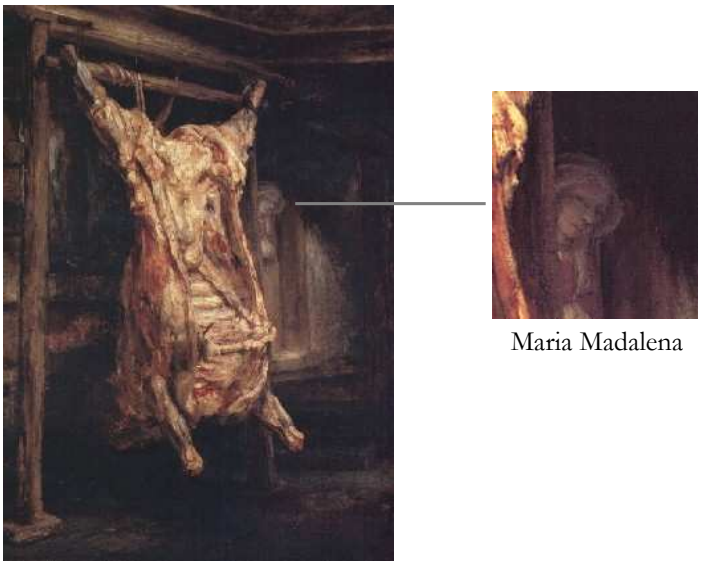


"Séneca" representa Jesus numa simbólica pia baptismal (início da missão, que agora culmina). Também a longa madeixa de cabelo e o escasso vestuário remetem para o Messias na cruz, estando a seu lado um cronista que evoca o evangelista João (o mais jovem dos doze apóstolos).

A cena representa não exactamente uma execução, mas antes o suicídio assistido de Séneca, artifício pelo qual Rubens aborda uma questão teologicamente controversa, nomeadamente a equiparação da morte de Jesus a um suicídio, pois esse destino fora desejado e até procurado, apesar de cumprido pelos soldados romanos.

Tornando a Rembrandt, compreende-se agora melhor o intuito de composições como o *Boi esfolado*, que alude aos tormentos do Messias na coluna e na cruz, bem como à Sua dimensão carnal.

Rembrandt
Boi esfolado



Maria Madalena

Em suma, os diferentes exemplos que foram sendo apresentados reflectem quer a dimensão humana e evolutiva de Cristo, quer o particular dinamismo com que os pintores estruturavam os seus trabalhos, combinando e sobrepondo diferentes níveis de interpretação.

Neste contexto, era comum os próprios artistas serem actores nas respectivas obras, expiando os seus pecados e desejando ascender a um melhor patamar ético e espiritual.

Se alguns deles – como Lucas Cranach ou Matthias Grünewald – denotam uma certa modéstia ao fazerem-se integrar em personagens secundários, já outros não resistiram a transfigurar-se no próprio Cristo, entre o Céu e a Terra.

Leonardo

Rafael

Dürer

2013

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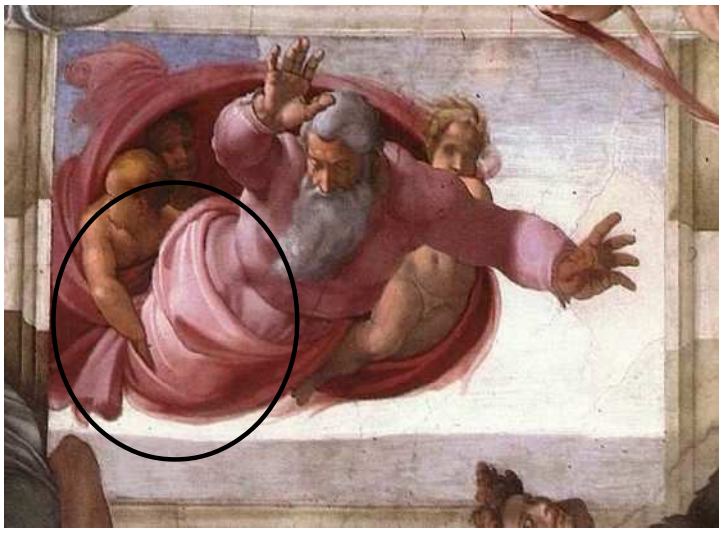
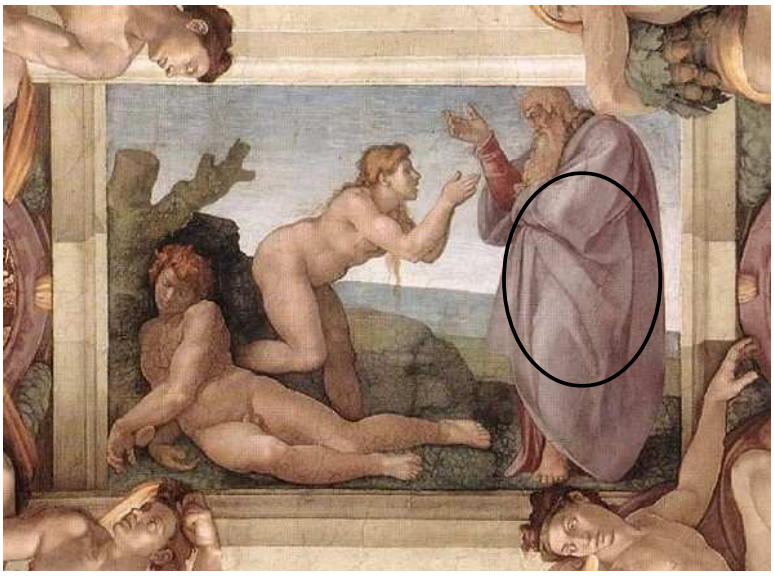
The Devilish Chapel of Michelangelo

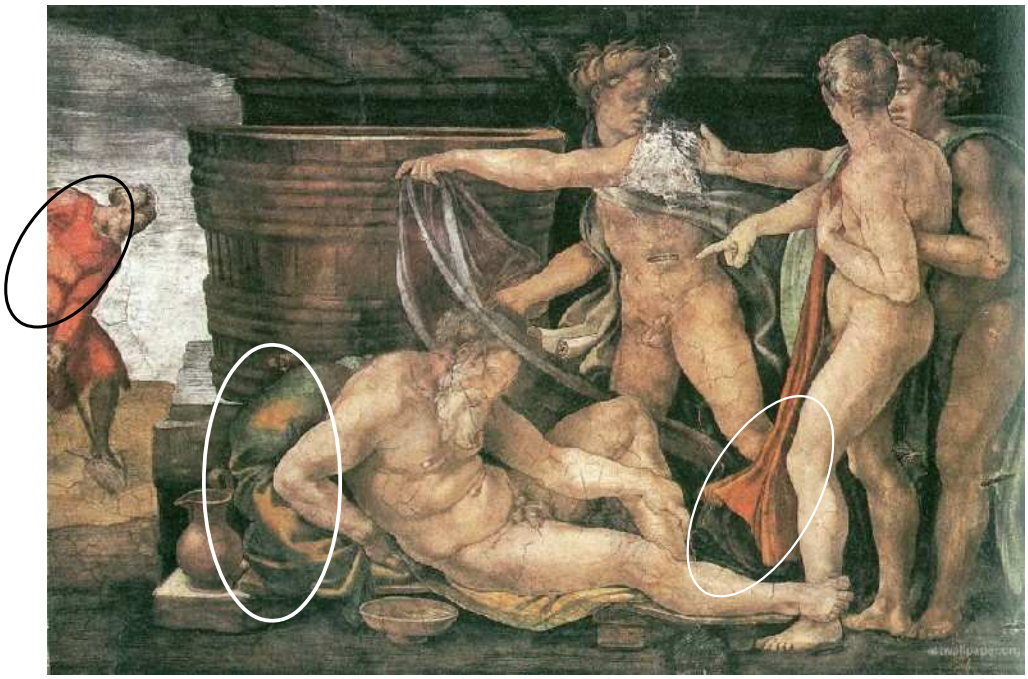
Paulo Martins Oliveira

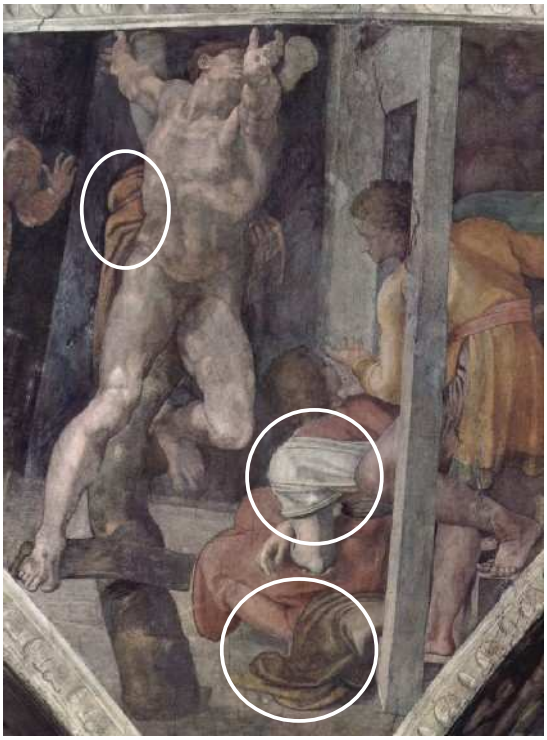
Examples



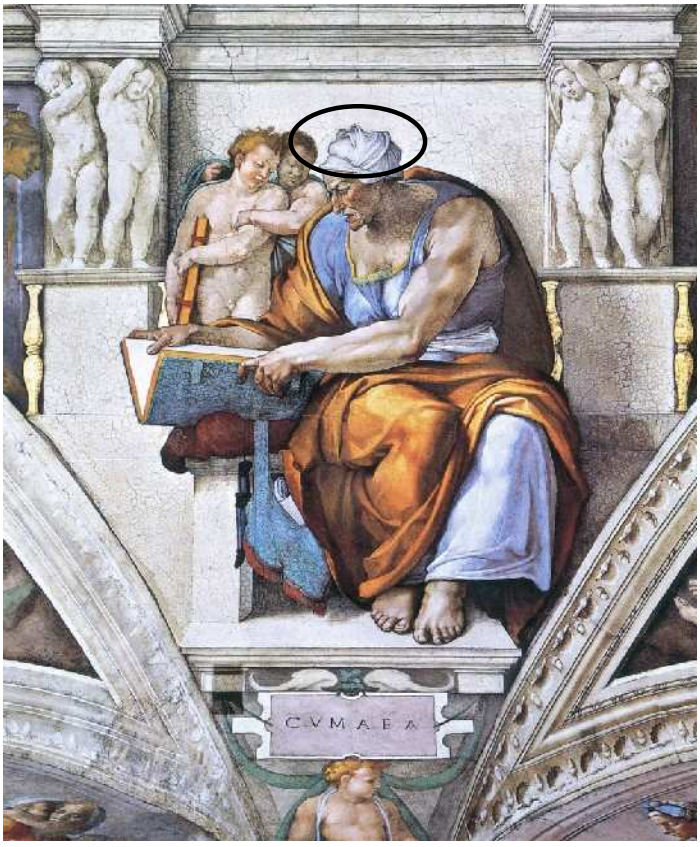
Correggio



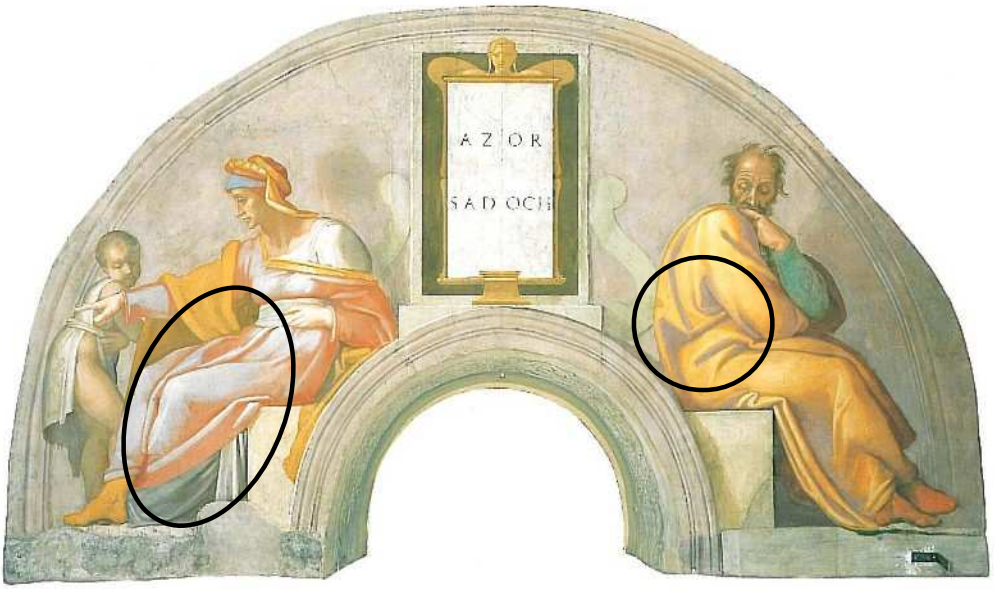




Bosch



DELPHICA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SALOMON

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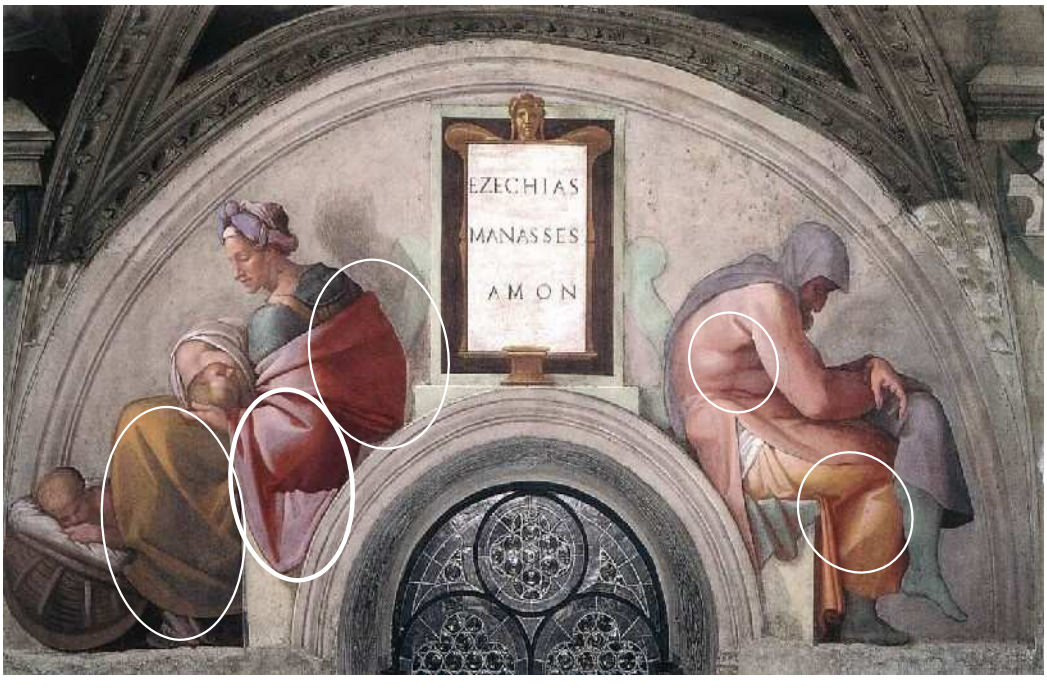
EZECHIAS
MANASSES
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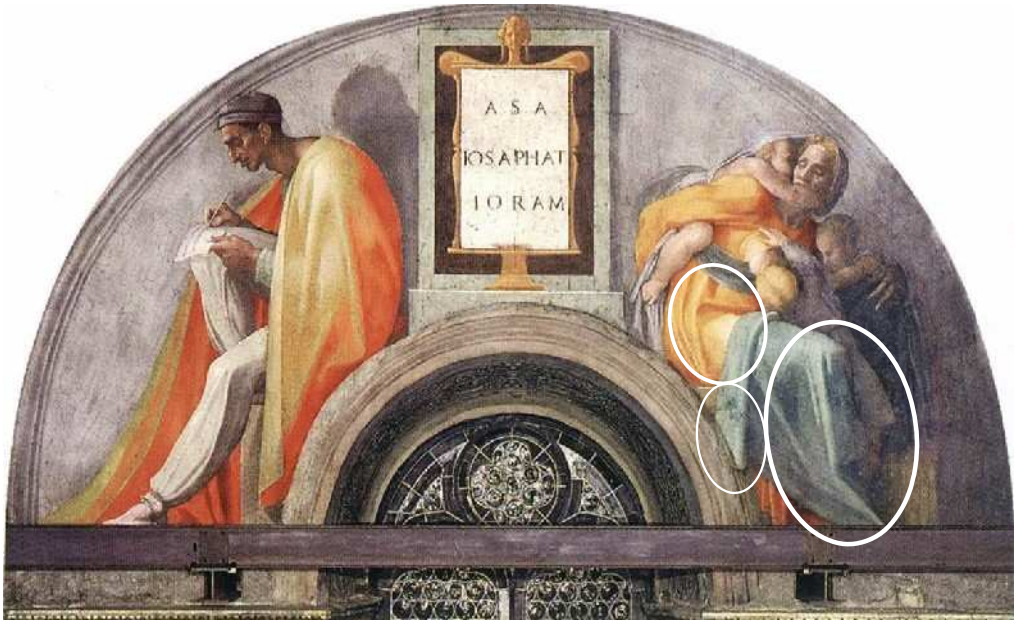
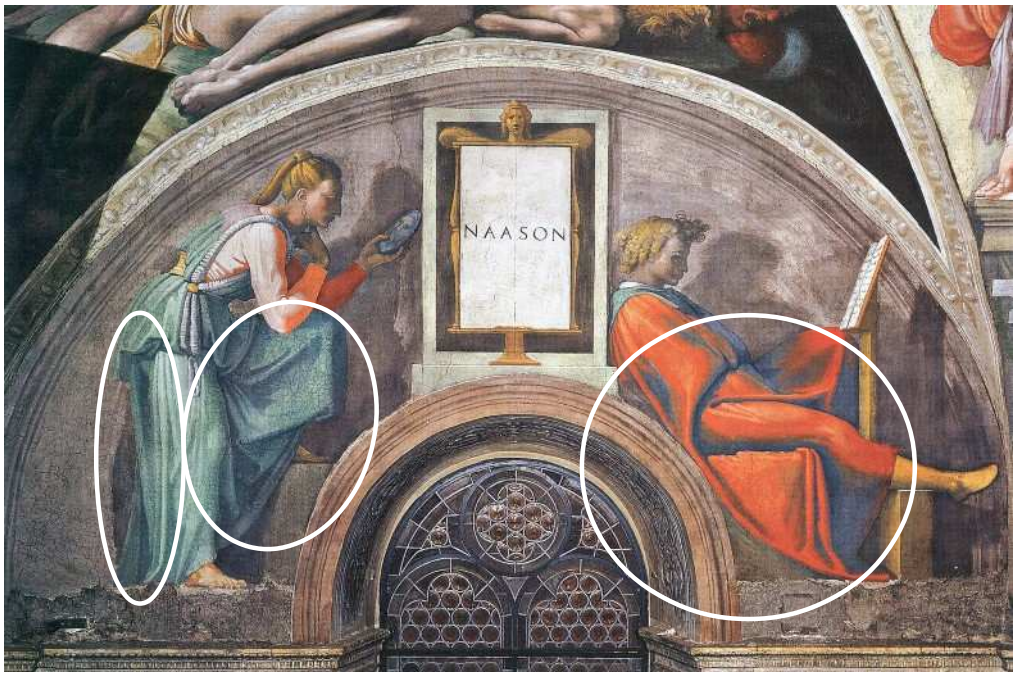
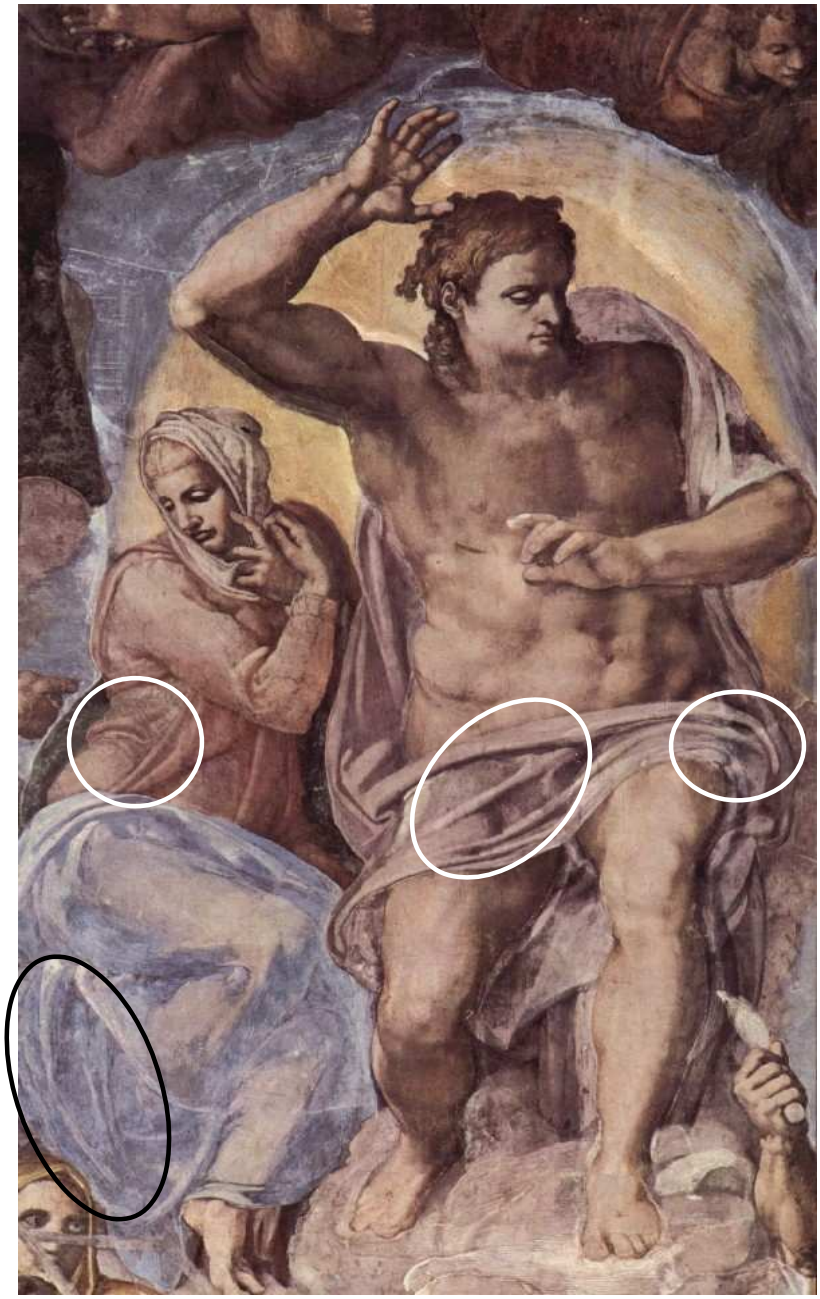
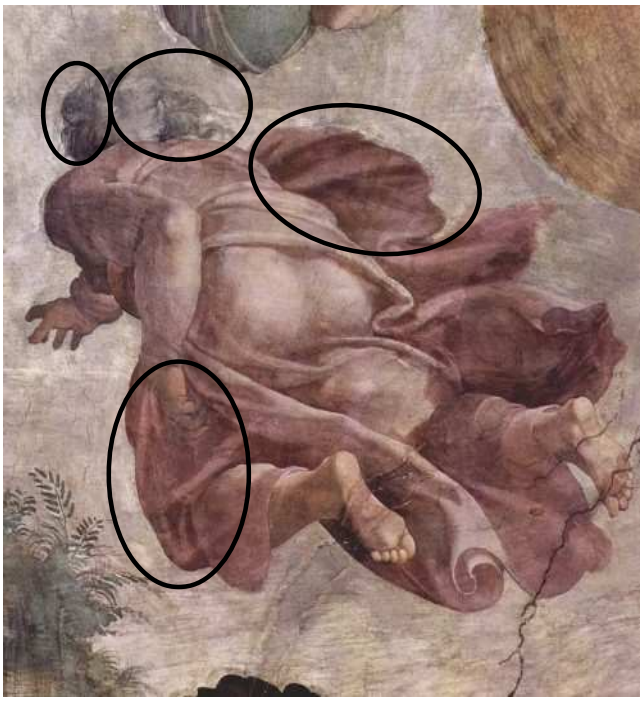

ASA
IOSAPHAT
IORAM


NAASON





2013

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O Falso Paraíso de Tiziano

Paulo Martins Oliveira

A autonomia intelectual e uma visão sarcástica sobre os poderes instituídos foram características que marcaram a produção artística dos séculos XV, XVI e XVII.

Para o efeito recorreu-se a expedientes propositadamente ambíguos, que na verdade satirizam os clientes, quando em princípio eles pareciam ser homenageados, fossem altos clérigos, nobres ou mercadores abastados.

Um desses recursos baseia-se na dissimulação de figuras demoníacas, as quais, por serem inesperadas, passam despercebidas enquanto parte integrante de vestuários, mobiliário, ramagens de árvores ou até grandes formações rochosas, por exemplo.

Estes exercícios heterogéneos foram moldados em cada pintura conforme a respectiva narrativa.

Assim, em múltiplos casos, os artistas recorreram a esses "demónios" também para, veladamente, admitirem e penitenciarem-se veladamente pelas suas próprias faltas e pecados.

De facto num mundo afectado pelo mal, as tentações espreitam e aguardam a oportunidade em todo o lado, não deixando imunes até as figuras santas ou sequer Jesus Cristo, cuja dimensão humana era sub-repticiamente sublinhada pelos intelectuais e livres-pensadores humanistas.

Neste contexto, os "demónios" nas roupas dos santos ou de Cristo expressam que mesmo eles estiveram sob a ameaça permanente de Lúcifer.

Todavia, em algumas narrativas os artistas foram ainda mais longe, criando falsas divindades cristãs para reforçar como são engenhosos os artifícios do mal. Por seu turno, estes cenários foram utilizados para aí colocar os clientes a "punir", bem como os próprios artistas penitentes.

Um dos pintores que desenvolveu este conceito foi Tiziano Vecellio (c.1588/90-1576), cujas obras são variadas, cabendo aqui destacar a grande tela hoje exposta no Museu do Prado e intitulada *A Santíssima Trindade*, ou *La Gloria*.

Nesta composição, o artista italiano parece ter criado uma triunfal imagem celeste, reunindo algumas das principais figuras da teologia cristã.

Por seu turno, no lado direito são visíveis o imperador Carlos V, a sua (já falecida) esposa Isabel de Portugal, e o filho de ambos, Filipe, futuro II de Espanha.

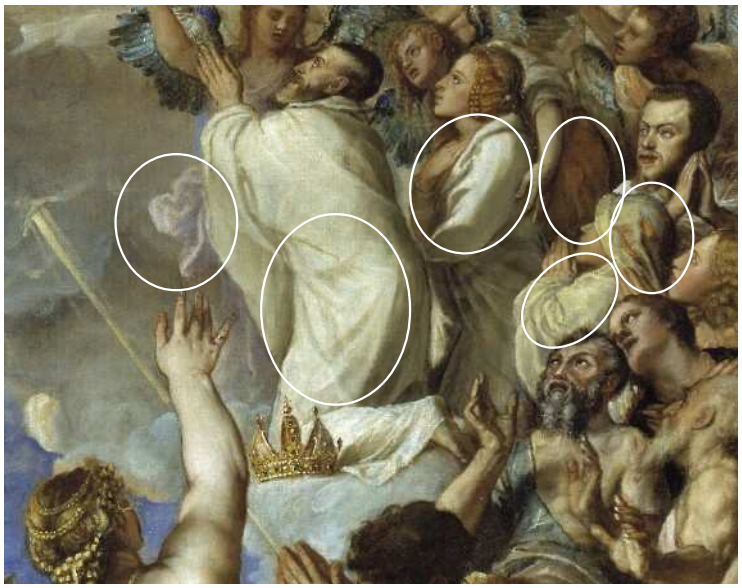
Outros retratos por Tiziano

Logo abaixo identificam-se outras figuras da mesma Casa, bem como o próprio Tiziano, no papel discreto da figura calva e de barba, no limite da pintura.

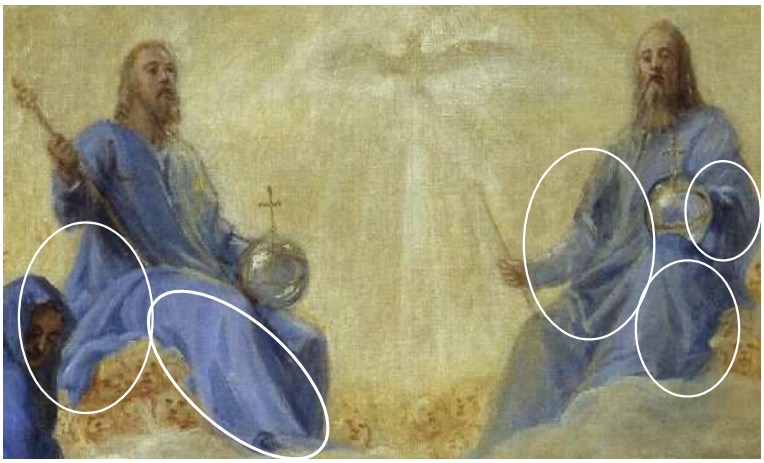
Retratos simbólicos de Tiziano

Pietà, det. (Veneza)

Não obstante, numa camada subjacente, percebe-se que tudo não passa de um logro, e que os referidos personagens se encontram, afinal, num falso Paraíso.



De igual modo, habilmente denunciados por demónios nos vestuários, também Deus Pai e Filho são enganadores. Já a figura feminina é na verdade Maria Madalena, seguindo determinadas convenções que circulavam entre os artistas, que frequentemente a seleccionavam como um provocador indício da humanidade de Cristo (e.g. *Madalena*, por Savoldo).



Uma observação cuidada permite ainda concluir que, na parte superior, as múltiplas faces circundantes vão-se transformando em difusos semblantes demoníacos.

É pois neste cenário de ilusões que Tiziano integra a família imperial e a si próprio.
Carlos V estava já no fim da vida e preparava a sucessão, tendo sido colocada uma figura feminina que, provocadoramente, lhe acena em sinal de despedida. Ao fazê-lo ela junta os dedos médio e anelar, formando um "E", tratando-se de um dos vários códigos que identificavam os artistas livres-pensadores.

Alguns exemplos por vários artistas dos séculos XV e XVI:

Justamente, e como era habitual à época, Tiziano fez ainda incluir na obra uma importante alusão ao próprio contexto artístico em que se movia. Deste modo, no lado esquerdo surgem as grandes referências que marcaram o século XVI, obedecendo a um simbolismo também informalmente convencionado.

Assim, Michelangelo (ainda vivo aquando desta obra) surge distante e meditativo, enquanto Leonardo lê um livro.

Retratos simbólicos de Michelangelo, por ele próprio, Rafael e Delacroix

Retratos simbólicos de Leonardo, por Michelangelo, Rafael e Giorgione

No canto inferior esquerdo da grande tela de Tiziano, uma figura de cara virada auxilia Moisés a erguer uma das tábuas da Lei, bem como segura um rolo onde se pode ler o nome "Titianus" – a designação latina do autor da composição, que assim também integra o grupo.

Como era comum à época, Tiziano surge portanto duplicado na obra, de um lado junto dos imperiais, e do outro no partido dos artistas "insurrectos".

Aqui, o italiano encontra-se sobre uma grande águia, sendo que esses artistas maiores eram designados por Águias, como aliás dá conta Francisco de Olanda na sua famosa relação.

Note-se que a ave ameaça o ventre de Tiziano, fazendo lembrar uma outra pintura, também exposta no Museu do Prado e intitulada *O Castigo de Tício* (Tizio em italiano, Tityus em latim).

Trata-se de um personagem mitológico condenado à prisão no Tártaro, onde dois abutres lhe comeriam o fígado.

Adaptando a lenda e combinando-a, não por acaso, com a de Prometeu, Tiziano substitui os abutres por uma única águia.

O castigado Tício (Tizio, Tityus) simboliza Tiziano (Titianus), e a pena a que está sujeito encontra-se discretamente implícita também na pintura da *Santíssima Trindade*, onde essa águia se prepara para lhe aplicar um castigo idêntico, em sinal de auto-penitência do artista pelo seu trabalho "mercenário".

Em conclusão, a destreza de Tiziano reforça o quanto os trabalhos desta época eram sobretudo obras de intelecto, que fazem desenvolver outras narrativas a partir das camadas mais óbvias, sempre através de hábeis soluções de compromisso.

2013

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Botticelli's *Primavera*: the dual wind

Paulo Martins Oliveira

Being an expert in the use of ambiguities and double meanings, Sandro Botticelli superimposed several narratives in his *Primavera* (Uffizi, Florence).

Among other issues, the painting summarizes the continuous cycle of Nature, and for this purpose the artist merged the classical myths regarding such matter.

Thus, the winged figure on the right actually represents not only the wind Zephyr, but also Hades at the gates of his kingdom of shadows.

Zephyr in Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*

Both Zephyr and Hades are simultaneously seizing and releasing a feminine figure (respectively Chloris and Persephone), setting in motion the cycle of Nature (the releasing of Chloris/Persephone corresponds to spring, whereas the seizing symbolizes the arrival of winter. Because of this, the clothes on the right of the painting are being blown in opposite directions.

Layer 1
Zephyr and Chloris

Layer 2
Hades and Persephone

Wind blowing in opposite directions (seizing and releasing)

So, Zephyr/Hades personify winter, and the rest of the picture works in the same dynamic way.

2013

AS TAPEÇARIAS DE RAFAEL E AS CORTINAS PINTADAS

PAULO MARTINS OLIVEIRA

Durante os períodos medieval e renascentista, tornou-se relativamente comum que, nas igrejas, se ocultassem determinadas relíquias ou mesmo peças de arte, as quais eram temporariamente descerradas apenas em certas ocasiões solenes.

Este ritual simbólico prenunciava o Apocalipse, literalmente "Revelação", que culminará com os eleitos a poderem testemunhar a plenitude da glória divina, até lá oculta.

Por exemplo, em Sto. Agostinho de Nicósia (Itália), uma pintura de Álvaro Pires de Évora era coberta por uma cortina, descerrada unicamente em dias especiais[1].

Já a famosa *Virgem dos Rochedos*, de Leonardo, destinava-se a ocultar uma antiga escultura em madeira, apenas mostrada no dia da Imaculada Conceição[2].

Um caso de especial interesse verificava-se então na Sé do Funchal, cujo monumental retábulo era coberto por grandes cortinas que, quando deslocadas, amplificavam o sentimento de esplendor e de espectacularidade do templo, já por si uma antecipação da Jerusalém Celeste.

Este contexto permite entender melhor a utilização das tapeçarias que Rafael idealizou para a Capela Sistina, nomeadamente para a faixa inferior das paredes laterais, onde por sua vez estão pintadas cortinas fechadas.

Sabendo-se que a Capela Sistina era palco quer de sessões quotidianas, quer de eventos especiais, e sendo também já conhecido que as tapeçarias de Rafael eram colocadas apenas pontualmente, a utilização destes panos parece ter seguido um modelo original, mas coerente: nas sessões quotidianas, as tapeçarias estavam retiradas, ficando visíveis as cortinas pintadas

[1] Cf. Reynaldo dos Santos: *Álvaro Pires d'Évora*, p.25.
[2] Cf. Frank Zöllner: *Leonardo*, pp.29-30.

nas paredes (que assim têm um importante papel simbólico); já nos eventos de maior solenidade, estas cortinas eram "descerradas" com a colocação fronteira das tapeçarias; quando estes panos eram novamente retirados, as cortinas fechadas ressurgiam, e a Capela voltava à sua rotina (por exemplo com a missa papal diária).

Ainda que invulgar, tal procedimento insere-se no contexto da época, e explica a bizarra pintura de cortinas fechadas nas paredes, harmonizando-as com as tapeçarias de Rafael.

Valorizava-se assim o trabalho de um afamado artista sem lhe ferir as susceptibilidades, pois tratava-se de um declarado rival e antagonista de Michelangelo, o qual havia trabalhado a parte superior da Capela.

Mais importante, com este sistema intensificava-se a teatralidade e o dinamismo de um espaço já de si magnificente.

Disponibilizado para consulta
Setembro de 2015

DISSECTING TITIAN´S CHRIST CARRYING THE CROSS (PRADO)

Paulo Martins Oliveira

When studying multi-layered artworks from the past centuries, it should be noted that even just the official layer of a given painting is actually made of the combination of different (but relatable) levels of meaning.

The ultimate goal was to create and refine extremely ingenious designs, often in a competitive context between artists.

Example by Titian (Tiziano Vecellio)

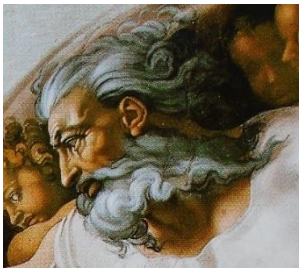
Christ carrying the cross, ca.1565, Madrid, Museo del Prado (inv.P438)

Superimposed, articulated meanings:

1. Simon of Cyrene helping Christ carrying the cross (Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21).

2. God the Father giving strength and courage to His Son.

Comparative example



God the Father by Michelangelo[1]

3. The Old Testament (God the Father) and the New Testament (Christ), i.e. the unity and coherence of the Bible.

4. The dual Christ choosing and accepting His tragic mission, thus abdicating an earthly older version of Himself.

5. The elderly John the Evangelist recalling the Crucifixion (he was regarded as being John the Apostle – the only disciple to witness that event). Moreover, John was the favourite apostle of Christ, Who even asked him to take care of the Virgin as if she was John´s own mother. In a sense, Jesus and John became "brothers".

6. In this multi-layered theological composition, also the meaningful depiction of fingers and iron nails provide a versatile combination of typical symbolic numbers used in the Bible.

But besides the official theological messages, the artist embedded other meanings. For instance, and considering the brotherhood mentioned above in #5, the image of Christ also evokes the tragic figure of Giorgione, who was also recalled in other paintings by Titian.

Comparative examples

Giorgione, *Allegorical self-portrait* (Braunschweig)

Titian, *The Bravo* (Vienna)

Concluding, the painting in the Prado Museum is one more example of the exceptionally elaborate devices created by artists such as Titian, whose talent is even greater than currently recognized.

Available online for consultation

September 2015

NOTE

[1] In fact, artists were constantly replicating, elaborating and reinventing images of each other, in order to present increasingly complex and challenging compositions. In the case presented here, Titian found inspiration in Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*, which in fact also represents God the Father next to Christ (as the New Adam, see 1Corinthians 15:22, 45-49; both are generating the Holy Spirit). On this overlapping (original Adam/New Adam) see *Leonardo x Michelangelo*, pp.107-109, as well as the paper titled *The Sistine Chapel and the Holy Spirit*.

LEONARDO AND THE BOSCHIAN TRIBUTE (I)

Paulo Martins Oliveira

January 2016

As argued elsewhere, there are a number of evidences linking Jheronimus Bosch and Leonardo da Vinci[1].

Examples of adaptations from Bosch

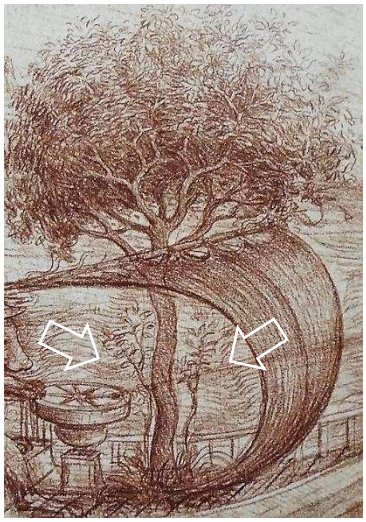
Leonardo da Vinci, *Allegory with wolf and eagle*, ca.1516
Royal Collection, Windsor Castle

The Ship of Fools

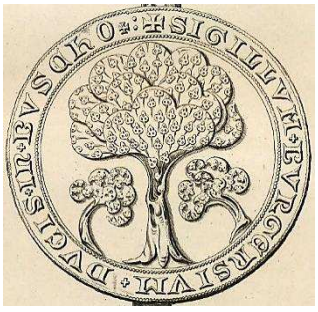
The Garden of Earthly Delights, det.

In this regard, it is possible to stress that Leonardo's *Allegory with wolf and eagle* (ca.1516) is indeed a tribute to the recently deceased northern fellow (†1516), whose ingenious and surreptitious accusations about foreign ambition suited perfectly the Italian situation as well[2].

As a matter of fact, there are subtle but significant details corroborating such a conclusion. For instance, it is visible that the tree on board is symmetrically flanked by two smaller ones, which corresponds to the distinctive coat of arms of 's-Hertogenbosch – a particularly important reference for Bosch[3].



det.



The inspiring coat of arms of 's-Hertogenbosch and examples of allegorical adaptations by Bosch (transforming the side trees into ears and limbs, respectively).

Nevertheless, Leonardo's drawing contains other references to Jheronimus Bosch himself, which is to be mentioned in future contributions.

Research paper available for consultation

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NOTES

[1] See *Jheronimus Bosch – o relojoeiro dos símbolos*, pp.49-51, 74, 128-130, 144-147, 167; and page 11 of *The nationalist and rational Jheronimus Bosch*.

[2] Despite de differences within the Italian Peninsula, there was a shared cultural consciousness binding the various communities (e.g. Machiavelli's writings), which was comparable to the situation of the Low Countries (≈ the divided and sometimes rival Tribes of Israel, enslaved or simply hypnotized by foreign powers).

[3] In addition to the mentioned in the paper *The damned shield of ('s-Hertogen) Bosch*, there are other important elements to take into consideration.